







# **EUROPE ASKS : WHO IS SHREE KRISHNA**

**( Letters written to a Christian Friend )**

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# Europe asks : Who is Shree Krishna

## LETTERS WRITTEN TO A CHRISTIAN FRIEND

### THE DOCTRINE OF AVATAR

#### LETTER I

The earliest mention of Shree Krishna is to be found in the Rig-Veda, the oldest record not only of the Hindus but of the whole Indo-Aryan family of peoples, who, as you know, are believed to include almost all the great races of modern Europe also. This Krishna is a Vedic *rishi* or seer. He is described as the son of one Ghora Angirasa. Scholars presume that this Krishna of the Rig-Veda was a non-Aryan bard or seer, and the inclusion of his hymns in the Vedas indicates a very early period of Aryan and non-Aryan race-fusion in India. But the generality of the Hindus do not know this Krishna, the son of Ghora Angirasa.

#### SHREE KRISHNA IN THE MAHABHARATA

The Shree Krishna who is worshipped by the Vaishnava Hindus all over India is a prominent figure in the great Sanskrit Epic, the Mahabharata. He is regarded by our people as an *avatar* or

what you would call an incarnation of God. But the English word incarnation conveys a very imperfect meaning of what we understand by *avatar*. The root meaning of the two words is different. Incarnation is from 'carnis', flesh. *avatar* is from 'ava' which means down, and 'taran' to come. *Avatar* means, thus, that which has come down. You read in Matthew that the Spirit of the Lord 'descended' upon Jesus immediately after his baptism by John the Baptist. The Hindu will say that before his baptism Jesus was only a natural man. It was only after he was baptised and the Spirit of the Lord descended on him, that he became an *avatar*. The concept *avatar*, you will thus see, is much broader and indeed more universal, so to say, than what is understood by the term incarnation.

#### HINDU DOCTRINE OF AVATAR

When, therefore, I tell you that our people regard Shree Krishna as an *avatar*, you must not think that he is the only incarnation in Hinduism. To the Hindu, from one point of view, the entire universe is a process of Divine Descent. Your people speak of the descent of man. My people speak of the descent of the whole creation. Indeed, we have no word corresponding to the English word creation.

Creation is derived from Latin '*creo*', to make out of nothing. But the logical mind of the Hindu never could conceive the production of anything from nothing. You know the Latin saying *ex nihilo nihil fit*—out of nothing proceeds nothing. We have a corresponding Sanskrit dictum '*Na'sato Sajjayate*' ( নাসতো সজ্জায়তে ) from that which is not, that which is can never come into being. Hindu thought, therefore, never believed in what is called creation in English. What then, is the origin or cause of this world-process ?

#### THE PROBLEMS OF CREATION

Generalising from universal experience, Hindu thought posited a dual cause behind every effect. One is called the efficient cause ; and the other, the material cause. The potter, for instance, is the efficient cause of the pot, while the clay, which he places and turns upon his wheel, is the material cause of it. Some schools of Hindu thought, following the logic of this universal sense-experience, have posited a dual cause at the back of this universe, namely, the Lord or *Iswara* ( literally, the Director ) who is the efficient cause, and primordial matter or atoms, which are the material cause of it. Both God and matter are here viewed as co-eternal

and co-existent. But others, and they form the majority of our people, have rejected this dual origin of the universe as a logical fallacy. They say that the First Cause must be absolutely One and Self-sufficient. It cannot depend upon anything else for producing the effect. To postulate any manner of duality in the First Cause would be to destroy its claim and character as the First Cause. This duality would demand, by its own logic, a Third through which the two elements of this so-called First Cause would stand related to each other. Without it there could not be any rational relation between the Efficient and the Material Cause of the universe.

The potter and the clay stand in a certain relation, for instance, in the production of the pot. But every relation implies first, two or more factors of relation ; and second, a principle of relation. This principle holds both the factors together and renders their mutual co-operation possible. If, therefore, we accept the Lord as the Efficient Cause of the universe, and Atoms as its Material Cause, we shall have to find a Third which holds together both God and the Atoms, and thus renders their mutual co-operation possible. This Third must be simultaneously both in the Lord and in the

Atoms, and must, therefore, at the same time stand outside either of these two. That Third would be the real Ultimate Cause of which both the Lord and the Atoms are parts or limbs, so to say. The stern logic of thought has, therefore, forced us to dismiss all dualistic theory of the origin of the universe and proclaim Brahman or the Ultimate Reality as both the Efficient and Material Cause of this world-process.

In the beginning ( we thus read in the Upanishads ) the True alone was, my beloved, the One-without-a-Second. Nothing else was that moved in this moving world. And He thought within Himself, I desire to be many ; and He became many, both this and that, both truth ( or reality ) and untruth ( or appearance ), both that which is according to law and that which is not according to law. The One-without-a-Second multiplied Himself for the purpose of bringing forth this universe. This, briefly, is the dominant Hindu explanation of the world-process.

#### HINDU "PANTHEISM"

At one time European Christian thinkers used to summarily dismiss this Hindu thought as pantheistic. But the question is,—call it



pantheistic or pot-theistic to use a caustic Emersonian word—is this view of the world true or false ? Is, what you call God, really the First Cause, or is He only the Master-BUILDER or Architect of this universe ? Did He fashion this wonderful fabric or structure of the universe with the help of some outside material, or did He produce it out of Himself ? This is the crux of the whole problem. If you say that He is the First Cause, then this world-process must have proceeded from His own being and must have been fashioned out of His own substance. There is absolutely no way out of this conclusion.

#### THE DOCTRINE OF WORD

In fact, even your Bible does not support any dualistic origin of the universe. There is no mention of any outside material which was used by God to fashion this universe. Whatever was produced was produced by the 'word' of God. "God said, let there be light, and there was light." In this way, by only saying let this be so, He produced everything. It means that this world is only an expression of the will of the Lord, a revelation in time and space of His Idea. And is not His Idea really Himself ? Can you separate the thinker

from his thought, the creator from his creation? In the Fourth Gospel you find a clearer exposition of this truth. "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the word was God." It is this Word of God which was with Him from eternity to eternity, which created all things, not really out of nothing, but out of its own Self or Substance. The world-process is, therefore, really a process of the Word becoming flesh.

The Hindu view is not different from this Biblical interpretation of the world-process. In the beginning was the True alone. And to shut out all suspicion of duality here, our scriptures declared that this True or *Sat* or Reality was One-without-a Second. And it is this Ultimate Truth or Reality, which is being progressively manifested in and through the world-process. This Reality is both the Efficient and the Material cause of the universe.

#### THE DOCTRINE OF BRAHMAN

Our word for this Ultimate Reality, as you know, is Brahman. The entire doctrine of this Brahman is built upon universal human experience. This experience establishes three prominent facts : first, we see things that were not in existence at one time, come into

existence at another time ; second, we see things that thus come into existence continue to exist for a time ; and third, we see things that exist at one time, pass out of existence at another time. This universal experience raises the question : whence does that which was not, come to be ; how that which is continues to be, and where does that which disappears from the plane of existence go ? And the answer of Hindu thought to these triple questions is—**BRAHMAN**. Everything has proceeded from Brahman. Everything is sustained by Brahman. Everything moves towards and finally enters into Brahman during the state or stage of ultimate dissolution. Nothing, therefore, is outside Brahman. Nothing independent of Brahman. Brahman is everything. Everything is Brahman. Brahman is undivided and indivisible unity. Brahman exists in everything in His perfection and unity. He is as perfect in the atom as in the universe, as Emerson said. You cannot say a smaller part of Brahman is in a hillock and a bigger part in the Himalayas. You cannot say that a tiny part of Brahman is in the brilliant drop of dew on the lotus-petal and a larger and practically immeasurable part is in the blue expanse of the ocean's heaving bosom.

You will recognise the strange paradox concealed under this Hindu doctrine of the Ultimate Reality or Brahman. This Brahman is simultaneously in and outside everything. You may, therefore, say with equal truth that Brahman is everything and that He is none of these things. This is not really pantheism. True pantheism fancies God to be everything. Or, to put it the other way about, every particular object is God. The logic of this pantheism is polytheism. There are as many gods as there are particular objects. But this is not the position of the Hindu philosophy of Brahman or the Absolute. When the Hindu says that everything is Brahman, he means at the same time that none of these things is Brahman. Everything is Brahman in its essence or *ousia*, as the old Christian theologians would say. But nothing is Brahman in its appearance or hypostasis, in its manifestations or in course of its cosmic evolution. This evolutionary process means the progressive revelation or realisation of an Idea. This Idea is, therefore, less revealed or realised at one stage or in one object and more revealed or realised in another stage or another object. The Idea, though present in every object and stage of this process, is not fully revealed or realised in any. There-

fore, it may be very well said that this Idea is both in everything and in nothing. This apparent paradox sums up the truth about Brahman or the Absolute, as it has been apprehended from of old by our people.

#### HINDU DOCTRINE OF AVATAR OR INCARNATION

The Hindu doctrine of incarnation or *avatar*, as we would prefer to call it, has been built upon this doctrine of Brahman or the Absolute. This Brahman, as I have told you, is at once both the efficient and the material cause of this universe. This universe is, therefore, a manifestation of Brahman. Every manifestation presupposes a state of the unmanifested. This universe has existed in Brahman from before the birth of time in its unmanifested state ; just as, for instance, a thought exists in the mind of the thinker before it is put in words and uttered or written. Every thought is a self-revelation of the thinker. Even so this world of matter and man is only a self-revelation of Brahman. Brahman exists beyond and above this world-process. The self-revelation of Brahman in and through this world-process may very well be called, therefore, an act of descent. Brahman comes down, so to say, from His super-cosmic position, in seeking to

reveal Himself through this cosmic process. The whole world-process is, therefore, a process of the descent or *avatar* of the Lord. It is what you might very well call a process of Divine Incarnation. If you accept this view, as almost every Hindu does, matter will cease to be in your view mere material but will be revealed in your thought as the spiritual perceptions of the Lord materialised : and man will stand out before you as the Spirit of God incarnated. This, in a nutshell, is our view of both world and man.

#### COUNTLESS AVATARS

The Hindu believes, therefore, not in one but in endless *avatars* or countless incarnations of the Lord. Many *avatars* appeared in the past. Many more will appear in the future ; because the world-process has not reached its final perfection or completion as yet. It never will reach its end ; because that which this process has been seeking to reveal and realise is Brahman or the Infinite Himself, which knows no ending. In Christendom you have heard only of one incarnation, namely, Jesus Christ. In Him alone was the Word made flesh. But our sacred books speak of many incarnations. One of these books, the

Bhagabata, which is in a special sense the scripture of the Vaishnava Hindus or the votaries of Shree Krishna, speaks, in fact, of infinite incarnations of the Lord. "Just as from some inexhaustible water-basin flow innumerable springs of water, each inexhaustible, ( it declares ) ; even so from the Lord Hari, the Ocean of Light, Life and Joy, proceed countless *avatars*" or what you would call incarnations. The entire world-process is, thus, in the eye of the Hindu an endless procession of the descent of the Lord. Shree Krishna is, therefore, only one of the *Avatars* of Hinduism ; and even the votaries of Shree Krishna accept and honour the other incarnations or *Avatars* of the Lord. To understand the place of Shree Krishna in Hindu thought, you must first seize the breadth and universality of the general Hindu doctrine of *avatar* or incarnation.

#### SHREE KRISHNA'S OWN THEORY OF INCARNATION

And no Hindu teacher has given us a clearer enunciation of this doctrine than what Shree Krishna has himself given in the Bhagabat-Geeta. Starting with the Vedantic doctrine that all objects proceed from Brahman or the Absolute, exist in the Absolute, move towards the Absolute through processes of cosmic evo-

lution, and finally enter into the Absolute or Brahman, the source and satisfaction of all Life, Light, and Joy,—the Bhagabat-Geeta declares that in this endless chain of evolution or self-revelation of the Lord; every object does not equally reveal His Life, Light, and Joy. Though the Lord is present in all His infinitude of Life, Light and Joy in all and every object in this universe, and, therefore, there is not and can never be any qualitative or quantitative variation of His Essence or Presence in these various objects, there is a necessary variation in the measure of His manifestation. Some objects reveal Him more and some less. Just as when man throws his reflection upon a number of mirrors, some clear, some dark and dirty, some capable of taking a faithful impression of the object before it, others reflecting that object in distorted forms; and as the truth and reality of the man's face and figure remains the same, their reflection differing according to the character and quality of the different mirrors, so there is a variation in the measure of the Lord's manifestation according to the quality and character of the different objects of His creation. Some objects reveal His Life, Light, and Joy more than others. And, though none exhausts that Eternal Life,



Light and Joy, yet those objects that reveal that Life and Light and Joy more fully than the rest of their class are regarded as His *Avatars* or Incarnations in a special sense.

#### CLASSIFICATION OF AVATARS

Indeed, Hindu thought developed an elaborate philosophy of this world-process as a descent of the Lord. In some objects the Lord is only partially revealed ; these are called His *Amsas* or parts. These reveal not a part of the Life, Light and Joy of the Lord, but really the whole of it, only not in its full but in a lesser measure. The difference here is not qualitative, but only quantitative. Others are described as His limbs or organs. These reveal not the full quality of His Life, Light and Love, but only some particular aspects of that Life, Light and Love. There are other objects which reveal the powers and potencies of the Lord ; and these cover practically the entire creation. In all these various classes of the manifestation of the Lord, there are endless differences of more or less : in each class some objects reveal Him more than the others. This, briefly, is the theory of Divine Descent or *avatar*, as it has been developed by Shree Krishna Himself in the Bhagabat-Geeta. Here (Chap-

ter X) the Lord classifies all objects according to their nature and functions, and then declares Himself to be the highest and most developed and perfected individual of each class or type. Thus He declares : I am the Sun among luminaries ; I am the Ocean among all reservoirs of water ; I am the Moon among planets ; I am Rama among warriors ; I am the Prince among men ; and so on and so forth. This is really the essence of the Geeta doctrine of descent or *avatar*. This, my child, is the soul of the Hindu doctrine of *avatar*. And I have been led to enter into these abstruse things here because unless you are able to clearly seize this doctrine of Hindu *avatar* or incarnation, you will not be able to understand the real meaning and significance of the general Hindu belief in the incarnation or *avatar* of Shree Krishna. Because of this universality of the Hindu doctrine of *avatar* or incarnation, even those Hindus who do not worship Shree Krishna as the Supreme Lord, find absolutely no difficulty in giving honour unto Him as an *avatar*. And because every Hindu, or almost every Hindu, accepts the divinity of Shree Krishna, His teachings have had such a profound and universal influence over our social and historic evolution. But for this fact it would not have

been possible for me to proclaim Shree Krishna as the Soul of India.

#### SHREE KRISHNA THE FULLEST AVATAR

His faith in the universality of the descent or *avatar* or incarnation of the Lord, enables the Hindu to accept all the great Founders of religion, like Jesus and Mahommed the Buddha and Zoroaster and Moses, among the *Avatars* or Incarnations of God, along with Shree Rama Chandra, Shree Krishna and others who have been deified by his own people. But in this galaxy of great world-teachers, he would place Shree Rama Chandra and Shree Krishna as the highest and most perfect revelation of the Life, Light and Love of the Lord ; and, therefore, as His best and highest *avatar* or Incarnation. Nor will the Hindu admit that his preference for Rama and Krishna is due to what may be called his pride of race or patriotic bias. He thinks he has very good reasons for this preference.

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## LETTER II.

### DIFFERENT CLASSES OF AVATARS

There are many *avatars* or incarnations recognised by the Hindus. Indeed, as I told you in my last letter, Hindus believe in countless *avatars*. Of these, Shree Krishna is regarded as the highest. An *avatar* is that which reveals the Life, the Light and the Joy or Love of the Lord. Some reveal these Divine qualities less, some more. There is thus a difference in the character of these *avatars*. Shree Krishna reveals the full Life, Light, and Love of the Supreme Being. This is why he is regarded as the complete or the highest and most perfect *avatar*.

There are very minute disquisitions in our books on this doctrine of *avatar* or descent of the Lord. It will be tiresome, and at the same time not very profitable either, to carry you through all these disquisitions. The modern mind will dismiss a good deal of these as metaphysical or logical acrobatics and scholastic hair-splitting. We need not, indeed, worry ourselves over these mysteries. It is, however, necessary for a clear and cor-

rect understanding of our thesis that we should get a broad view of the general outlines of this doctrine.

Innumerable are the *avatars* of Hari, the ocean of Life, Light and Joy or Love, thus says the *Bhagabata*. There are vast differences in character and quality among these countless *avatars*. Hindu thought was led to attempt a classification of the *avatars*.

#### TWO ASPECTS OF BRAHMAN :

##### NIRGUNAM AND SAGUNAM

*Avatar*, as I told you, literally means the 'descent' of the Transcendent Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, which stands eternally beyond and above the creative process, into this process. The whole creation or the world-process, is therefore, a continuous act of the descent of the Lord. But though this world is from Brahman, and Brahman is both the efficient and the material cause of this world, this world is not Brahman. You must constantly bear this fact in your mind that Hindu thought, its apparent pantheistic emphasis notwithstanding, never identified this world-process with Brahman or the Absolute. This world, though it has proceeded from Brahman and is being maintained,

from moment to moment by Brahman, and though it ultimately resolves itself back into the the being of Brahman, is yet not the same as Brahman. Thought proceeds from the thinker. Words proceed from the speaker. Yet thought is not the thinker, nor words the speaker. Even so though this creation has proceeded from Brahman yet it is not Brahman. The thinker is greater than his thought ; the speaker is ever beyond the words he utters. Even so is Brahman greater than the world, stands beyond and above it ; yet Brahman is also in the world. The full and complete truth is, Brahman or the Absolute is at once both in and above the world-process ; Or to use a familiar modern phraseology, God is both Transcendent and Immanent. In our thought the Transcendent Reality is called Nirguna Brahman ; while the Immanent God is called Saguna Brahman.

#### NO AVATAR OF THE NIRGUNA BRAHMAN

These two words constitute the master-key to the mysteries of the Hindu-idea of *avatar*. The *Nirguna* Brahman admits of no *avatar*. Brahman by itself always means the *Nirguna*, or the Transcendent Reality. Therefore, the Hindu never speaks of the *avatar* or incarnation of Brahman. In Christian theology also, you do

not find any mention of the incarnation of the Father. It is the Word or Logos which is made flesh or incarnated, but not God Himself. But the Word is God, the very God of God. Christian theologians have sought to explain this identity of God with the Word, as identity in 'ousia' or essence. But the Word is different from God in hypostasis or appearance. And exactly in the same way Hindu thought has also sought to solve the problem of creation by keeping the *Nirguna* Brahman entirely out of this world-process, and positing the *Saguna* Brahman at its back. This *Saguna* Brahman is also called Iswara or the Lord. And all *avatars* or incarnations proceed in this world-process not from the *Nirguna* Brahman or the Transcendent Absolute, but only from the *Saguna* Brahman or the Immanent Absolute. This is the basis of the Hindu doctrine of *avatar* or incarnation.

#### THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE PERSONALITY

Present-day rationalism in Europe is inclined to dismiss the Fourth Gospel as unworthy of serious thought. But, my child, if you really care to enter into the mysteries of Hindu

thought and speculation, especially regarding this subject of incarnation, I would ask you to read the opening chapter of this Gospel once more with faith and in reverence ; and I have no doubt that you will find in it a mine of thought of incalculable spiritual value. Mark thus, first the words—In the beginning was the Word : the Word was with God. Beginning here means evidently from before the birth of the creative process. But as creation could not really have any definite beginning “In the beginning” means really from eternity to eternity. The ordinary meaning of the word beginning implies the time series. But here beginning refers to a state which is beyond and above the time series. Beginning means before the birth of time. Time means event. Beginning here means, therefore, before anything happened. We have the same word and the same idea in the text of our Upanishad already referred to, which says—The True alone was before, my beloved, the One-without-a-Second. This before means before creation was started. For purposes of this creation, the Absolute and Transcendent Unity was broken up, by what may be called an act of self-differentiation, into two parts or persons, one *Purusha* and the other *Prakriti*. In the transcendent state



Brahman is impersonal. Personality implies duality. It is through the necessary dualities of our rational, our emotional and our volitional life and activities that we realise our own personalities. We feel and know that we are we, or, in other words, that we are persons, in and through our juxtaposition with or difference from or opposition to other persons. And the measure of the perfection of our consciousness of our own personality is determined by the measure of the development of the same consciousness in those whose personalities standing ever against our personality call it into consciousness. The Sanskrit concept *Purusha* corresponds to the concept Personality in English. *Purusha* is a Person. But *Purusha* could never be a person unless he stood against another personality. And *Purusha* could never be a perfect person unless this other Personality that stood as his object was as full and perfect as himself. Both *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, the primary duality into which the Transcendent Unity of the Absolute or Brahman broke forth, so to say, by an act of self-differentiation, for initiating the creative process, are, therefore, Persons in Hindu thought, or, in other words, are self-conscious. Consciousness implies thought, and

thought implies a thinker or knower and an object of his thought or knowledge. And in the evolution of the Personality of the *Purusha*, *Prakriti* has been the object of His thought and knowledge, even as in the evolution of the Personality of the *Prakriti*, *Purusha* has been the object of Her ( *Prakriti* is conceived as the female element in this relation and is therefore of the feminine gender in Sanskrit ) thought and knowledge. And it is thus through the mutual relations of the personalities of the *Purusha* and *Prakriti* that the Impersonal Brahman really realises His Personality.

#### PURUSHA : THE FIRST CAUSAL PERSONALITY

This *Purusha*, the first Causal Personality in the initiation of the creative process, is called in our ancient books as the First *Avatar*. All the *avatars* proceed from this *Purusha*, called also *Iswara* or the Supreme Lord, or Director of the Universe. These *avatars* fall broadly into three classes, namely, (1) *Gunavatars* (2) *Yugavatars* and (3) *Leelavatars*.

#### GUNAVATARS

*Gunavatars* are three, Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara or Shiva. These three are also called the Hindu triad who are responsible for

the creation, preservation and dissolution of this creative process. Hindu thought posited three fundamental qualities or *gunas* behind this creative process. One is the quality of truth and light and joy. This is called *sattwa*. The other is the quality of activity and desire, called *rajas*. The third is the quality of inertia, ignorance and darkness, called *tamas*. This last quality is the predominant characteristic of the material universe. The second or the quality of *rajas* is the predominant characteristic of the general animal plane. The first or *sattwa*, the quality of illumination or reason and *anandam* or bliss that comes from conscious realisation of the self, is predominant in the pure spiritual plane, and is revealed in saints and sages and in all men in proportion as they rise to the level of the Divine. There the three qualities or *gunas* are the constituent elements of creation. They are the material, so to say, by the permutation and combination of which this world process is being worked and maintained. These three *gunas* or qualities exist in a state of perfect equilibrium in Brahman or the Absolute. It is through a break-up of this equilibrium that creation starts. Brahma, the Creative Power or Potency of the Absolute, is the *avatar* or incarnation of

the quality of *rajas* or desire and activity. Vishnu, the Power that sustains creation is the *avatar* or incarnation of the quality of *sattwa* or life, light and joy or love or *anandam*. Maheswara or Shiva, the Power that draws back the creation into its original form of the unmanifested, which means its dissolution or resolution, is the *avatar* or incarnation of the quality of *tamas* or inertia and inactivity. These three *Gunavatars* are conceived as the first emanation from the First *Purushavatar*. Brahma leads, directs and controls the generation of things. Vishnu sustains these things in their own nature and leads, directs and shapes them to their ideal ends or objectives. And Shiva, popularly called the Destroyer, leads creation finally to dissolution or resolution. This, briefly, is the view of the Hindu Triad, which must not be confused with the Hindu doctrine of the Trinity. For, I may tell you that there is a profound theory of what may very well be called the Trinity in Hindu thought also, which bears a very close similarity to the Christian Trinity. But of this I must speak another day. I refer to it here simply to warn you against confusing the Hindu Triad with this Trinity. You will notice here that Brahma, Vishnu and

Maheswara or Shiva, the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe according to popular Hindu belief, are not what you would call God. They are not names of the Absolute or Brahman. They are only *avatars* or incarnations of the First *Purushavatar*. These gods are, therefore, parts and elements of the creative process, are created objects; only they had precedence, so to say, of all other created objects except the First *Purushavatar* or what you would perhaps call the Son or the First-born of the Lord or Father.

#### BRAHMA, THE FIRST GUNAVATAR

You remember the text of the Upanishad which said : In the beginning the True alone was, my beloved, the One-without-a-Second. He desired to be many and He became many. Brahma, called the Creator, the first of the Hindu triad, the incarnation of the quality of *rajas* or desire and activity, really represents the personification, so to say, of the Primal Desire from which the creative process started.

But this "desire" of Brahman to be many must have had an object. What could that object be ? What, in other words, can be rationally accepted as the end and objective of this creative process ? What could

Brahman want? Want implies imperfection, lack of something. But the perfect Brahman could not lack anything. Yet when you say that Brahman desired to be many, you suggest a want. That is the great mystery of this creative process. And Hindu thought has tried to solve this mystery by referring to a common human experience. Men and women love to see their reflection on the mirror. Why? Because they desire to see themselves as the object of their own vision. Or, have you ever noticed a mother while fondling her baby in the ecstatic enjoyment of her Mother Love going to her dressing table to see the picture of herself as the fondling mother on the mirror before her? This is what lovers locked in each other's embrace also frequently do. Love desires to see its own picture, to objectify itself, so to say, for increasing the intensity of its own enjoyment. To speak in the language of the philosopher, this desire to objectively reproduce their own emotions and inner experiences is a necessary process of self-realisation. And arguing from this universal experience of our rational and emotional life, the Hindu declared that the objective of the "desire" of Brahman to be many, or, in other words, to objectively manifest

Himself to Himself is this Self-Realisation. But it must not be supposed that without this objective self-revelation the Absolute or Brahman is imperfect. Brahman is eternally self-realised. Why then did He desire to be many and become many ? Why has He been reproducing Himself upon the mirror or canvas of time and space ? The Hindu's answer to this question is summed up in one word—*Leela*, which means play or sport. Play is really without any outside object. Sport has no meaning or purpose except its own enjoyment. And the creative process has no meaning and purpose except the objective self-revelation of the Lord for the purpose of self-enjoyment.

Brahman, the One-without-a-Second, meditated within Himself and desired to be many and He became many or initiated this creative process, with a view to objectively reveal Himself and enjoy Himself as a progressive manifestation of Himself. It is like the desire of the full-grown oak ( if you can fancy the oak having any desire and self-consciousness ) to see its own life and growth reproduced before its own eyes in the sappling sprouting forth from its seed. Or, what we may understand better, it is like our own desire to see our life reproduced before our eyes in our own children.

Do we not re-live, so to say, our life in our progeny? That which is full and complete in us, so far as it may be, we see slowly growing, evolving by degrees in our children. And how do we enjoy it and feel our own self-realisation becoming fuller through this reproduction of ourselves in our boys and girls? On this analogy Hindu thought tried to understand, so far as it may be, the deep mystery of the creative process, the act of the Absolute or Brahman, the One-without-a-Second, that which is eternally self-realised, progressively manifesting Himself in and through this world-process, simply to enjoy Himself.

#### VISHNU : THE SECOND GUNAVATAR

If this world-process be a vehicle of the progressive self-revelation and self-realisation of the Eternally Self-Realised Brahman, then the Life, Light, and Joy or Love of Brahman must be the Regulative Idea in the evolution of this world-process. The Life, Light and Joy or Love of Brahman constitute the essence and substance of what is called the quality of *sattva* in our language. Of the three *Gunavatars* mentioned in a previous paragraph of this Letter, Vishnu is the *avatar* or incarnation of the quality of *sattva* in the Supreme Being.



Vishnu, therefore, is conceived as the sustainer of the world-process. The essence and substance of this world-process is, therefore, really the Pure Life, Light and Joy or *Anandam* or Love of the Lord. And as this world-process is sustained and guided and gradually led towards its consummation by the Life, Light, and *Anandam* or Joy or Love or Bliss of the Lord, Vishnu becomes its support and sustainer, the one eternal resource of all the various forces and potentialities which carry on this process from age to age and stage to stage. These various forces and potencies are therefore conceived as *avatars* or incarnations of Vishnu. Just as in Christian thought incarnation is not conceived as of the Father but only of the Word, even so in Hindu thought all our incarnations are described as incarnations or *Avatars* of Vishnu, the Sustainer of the universe. And the logic of it is, that this world-process has for its end and objective the revelation of the Life, Light, and Love or Joy of the Supreme Being from whom all objects have come into being, having come into being by whom all objects continue to be, and towards whom all objects move and into whom all objects enter. This world-process is, in other words, a process of the progressive self-revelation

and self-realisation of the eternally realised Life, Light or Reason and Joy or Love of the Absolute.

### THE THREE GUNAS

And Hindu thought has conceived this process of the self-revelation of the Lord, which means the manifestation in time and space of that which is beyond the time series and above all spacial relation and conditions, as proceeding from inertia, through activity, to joy or *anandam* and illumination. Of the three *gunas* or qualities or properties into which the entire universe was analysed by Hindu thought, namely, *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattwa*, the first or *tamas* or inertia dominates the earlier stages of the creative process or progression. Creation implies activity. Activity proceeds from desire. Activity, and its origin, desire are the characteristics of the quality of *rajas*. From *tamas*, or inertia, through *rajas* or activity and desire, to *sattwa* or complete illumination and *anandam* or joy:—this, in brief, is the norm and form of the creative process as it has been conceived by Hindu thought. Like all extremes, *tamas* and *sattwa* also meet. There is a very great similitude between these two *gunas* or qualities. Both are apparently a state of inactivity, but

only apparently, mind, and not really. *Tamas* represents the inertia which is characteristic of what we call matter. In the animal world, *tamas* represents the disinclination to exertion which is the characteristic of lifelessness. It proceeds from fear of exertion, the unwillingness to put forth any effort whatever. It is the quality, really, of extreme type of love for ease in humans. The lazy man takes things easy, because he cannot make up his mind to exert himself for the realisation of his ends. His inertia is a very low animal quality. In fact it is the quality of matter, as I have said, and the lowest form of animal life also. This inertia bears an external similitude with the highest spiritual stage. This spiritual state is, however, characterised by perfect illumination, which means the consciousness of the Universal in every particular, or of BRAHMAN in the multiplicity and totality of the universe or creation. The man who has attained this high spiritual state sees all things in BRAHMAN and BRAHMAN in all things, both severally and collectively. He lives in a perpetual consciousness of God. Not a sparrow can fall to the ground unless God wills it. Nothing, whether good, or evil, as we judge them, can happen unless He wills and permits it. God

fulfils Himself in many ways. He works good out of apparent evil. What appears to be good and what appears to be evil are both spokes in the eternal wheel of the Lord, upon which He is eternally turning and fashioning this universe-process towards its own end, which is the ultimate revelation of the perfected Life, Light and Love of the Lord. These are the characteristics of the person who has reached the highest *sattvika* state or stage of evolution. And the person who has attained this high illumination is not troubled by anything. He who has realised the *anandam* or the joy and love of BRAHMAN, from which have all things come, by which all things move,—the *anandam* or joy that is beyond words and beyond even the reach of our thought,—fears nothing: so say our Upanishads. And such a man finds, therefore, the peace that passeth understanding. And finding it, he is unmoved by either passions or desires or even by the conflicts of good and evil in this world. Apparently, therefore, such a man lives and moves and has his being like an automaton. He is like a marionette pulled by the unseen hand of the Lord. This is how, in appearance, the quality of *tamas* and the quality of *sattva* look

\*very much alike. But this apparent similitude notwithstanding, there is a world of difference between the two. It is really the difference between matter and spirit, between the inertia of the dead and the stillness of the saint, who is lost in deep meditation, wherein all outer sense-activities are stopped, the difference between darkness and illumination. The world-process proceeds from the *tamas* through the *rajas* to this highest *sattvic* state. And the progressive self-revelation of the Lord in and through this process also proceeds, therefore, from the lowest *tamasic* to the highest *sattvic* state. The descent or *avatar* or, what you would call, the incarnation of the Lord, the process of the Word becoming flesh, in and through the world-process, is necessarily conceived, therefore, as really an ascent from the lowest *tamasic* to the highest *sattvic* state. As Drummond has urged in his *Ascent of Man* (if my memory does not fail me), what is descent from one point of view is ascent from another. The spirit of the Lord descends in His creation to help its ascent to Him. It is only with man that the process of what Drummond called ascent starts. In our thought the process starts with the first act of descent or *avatar*. Every *avatar* or descent of the Lord is simultaneously an ascent of His

creation towards the fullness of His Life, Light and Love.

And what are called *Yugavatars* in Hindu thought, representing the various stages of the Lord Vishnu, the Sustainer of the world-process, mark, therefore, equally also the progressive ascent of the world towards Him. This is the basic idea of the theory of incarnation in Hindu thought.

And Shree Krishna stands highest in this incarnation series. But I must explain this more fully in my next letter.

## LETTER III

### YUGĀVATARS

Foreigners, when they read of the various incarnations of the Lord mentioned in Hindu books, are naturally impelled to dismiss the whole thing as a product of the untrained fancy of primitive culture. I shall not be at all surprised, therefore, if you find it very difficult to understand, much less appreciate, the meaning of what are called *Yugavatars* in Hinduism. But this difficulty will be due to the application of the forms of thinking, with which you are familiar, to the interpretation of our thought. You must, first of all, therefore, try to free your mind of the ideas with which the Christian doctrine of incarnation has been generally associated. You have been taught to believe that the need of this incarnation was to reconcile man to his God. Man had sinned against God. The first parent had disobeyed the order of his Maker, and as a punishment for the disobedience he and his progeny for all time to come had been condemned to banishment from heaven or companionship with God and His angels. Christ's incarnation was needed to expiate this original

sin of our race and to work out a reconciliation or atonement with our God. This, briefly, as you know, is the popular idea regarding the incarnation of Christ. To understand the real meaning and significance of this popular doctrine of the incarnation of Christ, you have to, as you know, go to Judaism. The Jews believed in sacrifices. You find it in the Old Testament how the Jews repeatedly disobeyed their Lord Jehova, and as often sought to regain his favour by making peace-offerings to him. The first parent had sinned against God by disobeying His order ; and mankind had been condemned to eternal punishment for it. The only way to their reconciliation with their God was, therefore, according to the Hebrew consciousness, through some sort of peace-offering. Among the Hebrews the highest and the purest sacrifice and peace-offering and sin-offering was the spotless lamb, the first born of the flock. So it came to be conceived that the peace-offering and sin-offering to God, as an expiation of man's first disobedience to his Maker and Master, must be the first-born of God Himself. The Son of God came to earth and took human form to offer himself as a vicarious sacrifice to expiate the sin of man. This doctrine of Christian incarnation is evolved thus from the Judaic



conception of sin and sacrifice. It received subsequently a new and deeper meaning and significance when the early Christians came in contact with Greek thought and culture, to which Christianity is unmistakably indebted for the fundamental doctrine of the Fourth Gospel, the doctrine, namely, of the Word or Logos—the Word that was with God, that is the very God of God—and that has been incarnated in Jesus, the Christ. This is how Christ came to be conceived as the ‘only begotten Son of God’, and, as had the familiar text, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” for its salvation. In this Christian doctrine of incarnation you find thus two powerful thought-currents mixed up, and in the light of these two great world-thoughts, Hebrew and Hellenic, that you have to study and understand the true meaning and significance of it.

The Hindu doctrine of incarnation, or incarnations, more correctly speaking, must similarly be studied in the light of the general thought and philosophy of the Hindus.

As I have already tried to tell you, to the Hindu, the whole world-process represents a continuous chain of incarnations. It means the process of the progressive manifestation of the one Truth or Reality, the process of the

One-without-a-Second becoming many. This process is practically what we call Evolution in our time. This evolutionary process is marked by three stages; first, of homogeneity, second, of differentiation, and third, of integration. Herbert Spencer has made us more or less familiar with this fundamental logic of Evolution. The ancient Hindus seem to have got an intuition of it ages and ages before Darwin and Spencer. As I told you in a previous letter, this is really the doctrine of our ancient Upanishads. In the beginning the True alone was and He desired to be many. This is Hindu cosmogony. Later Hindu speculations seem to have combined this Upanishadic doctrine with ancient science, and thus evolved the scheme of what are called *Yugavatars* in our literature. *Yuga* in Sanskrit means an epoch. *Yugavatars* are, therefore, the *avatars* or incarnations of the Lord Vishnu, the Preserver of the universe, the Regulative Idea, as we might call him, of the entire process of cosmic evolution during different epochs or stages of this evolutionary process. These *Yugavatars* must, therefore, be studied and understood in the light of this evolutionary process. Their science might have been wrong, as to which I say nothing one way or the other, but the fundamental

logic of thought upon which the ancient Hindus built their scheme of these *Yugavatars* can hardly be dismissed as absolutely false or peurile even by the modern man, whether in Europe or India.

#### COSMIC EVOLUTION AND YUGAVATARS

And if you will only seek to read the story of these *Yugavatars* or incarnations of the Lord Vishnu, the Force and Power that maintains and sustains this world-process, in the light of the modern law or doctrine or principle of Evolution, you will have no reason to find shocked by their apparent incongruity. And the master-key to these secrets is the idea that everything is from God, who is both the efficient and the material cause of this universe ; and consequently, what we call matter is only the idea or thought of God materialised and man is the Spirit of God incarnated. But should I speak of man alone as an incarnation of the Lord ? Even the so-called lower animal kingdom is equally His incarnation or *avatar*. He is in all his fullness and perfection, nay, indeed, in his very infinity, present in the vilest vermin that crawls the earth as He is in the highest specimen of our common humanity. All live and move and have

their being in Him ; all are manifestations of Him ; but none, neither the lowest nor the highest, exhaust this manifestation. This is the fundamental idea of the Hindu doctrine of *avatar* or incarnation ; and it is in the light of this doctrine or idea that you must consider what are called *Yugavatars* in our thought-literature.

The first of these *Yugavatars*, the lowest in the series, is *Matsya*. *Matsya* in Sanskrit means fish. And this doctrine of the *Matsya-avatar* means the descent of the Lord Vishnu in the earliest stage of cosmic evolution. This world first came into being as an infinite expanse of water. This is how ancient Hindu thought conceived of the beginning of this cosmic evolution. I do not say it is science. But I do claim that on this hypothesis we are able to discover the real meaning of the first *Yugavatar* being conceived as a fish; because fish represents the highest form of life in water. The next stage is formation of land out of this limitless expanse of water. And here the *Yugavatar* is conceived as tortoise which is about the highest specimen of amphibious life. The next stage represents when solid earth having risen from the bosom of the limitless expanse of water, has been covered with wild vegetation ; and in this stage the highest specimen of life is conceived as that of the boar.

The next stage of evolution is conceived as that wherein wild animals rule the earth ; and here the *Yugavatar* is *Nrishimha*, or a combination of the highest expression of the life and evolution of the animal kingdom in the lion and of the first expression of human life. *Nrisimha*, in Sanskrit, is a compound word, composed of 'nri,' meaning man, and 'simha' lion. The next stage of evolution is represented by the dwarf, or *Vamana*. These are the principal *Yugavatars*. And when you read these in the light of the general Hindu philosophy of cosmic evolution, and interpret them as the highest revelation of the Regulative Idea that has evolved and sustains the process of cosmic evolution, you will find, I trust, nothing so hideously incongruous or blasphemous in the presentation of the Lord as incarnated in Fish, or Tortoise, or Boar or Man-Lion or Dwarf. You must also bear it in mind that the Hindu never accepts any of these as the highest or the fullest and the most perfect incarnation or *avatar*. All these are only partial *avatars* or incarnations of the Lord. There is also the idea of a graduation underlying this series of *Yugavatars*. *Matsya* stands lowest in this series, and *Vamana* or the Dwarf, the lowest specimen of humanity, as the highest. But on the human plane, *Vamana* stands, however,

as the lowest of the *avatar* series. After the *Vamana* or the Dwarf epoch, evolution ascends to a different plane altogether. This is what may be called the truly human plane. It is the special plane. It is on this plane that man really commences to realise his own identity as man in and through his multitudinous social relations.

In the beginning the True alone was, the One-without-a-Second. He desired to be many. To become many, that One-without-a-Second differentiated Himself from Himself and thus called into being the three *Gunavatars*, Brahma, the Creative Energy of the Lord, Vishnu, the Life, Light and Love of the Lord, that sustains and directs the course of cosmic evolution, including human evolution, and Maheswara or Shiva, the power of the Lord that draws creation back into Himself.

In the cosmic process the Lord Vishnu, who is the Regulative Idea of it, and constitutes both the norm and the form of this progressive manifestation of His Life, Light and Love, descends or incarnates Himself, from stage to stage, as *Yugavatars*. The first of these is conceived as *Matsya-Avatar*, the next as *Kurma-Avatar*, the third as *Baraha-Avatar*, the fourth as *Nrishimha-Avatar*, and the fifth as *Vamana-Avatar*.

But the process of cosmic evolution does not end here. In the *Vamana* or the dwarf we reach the lowest and the earliest step in the ascent of man, as Drummond would say. From this point we start upon a new plane and with this new plane of being there starts a new series of *avatars* or incarnations. Shree Krishna stands at the top of this series. He is, therefore, called by his votaries as *Purna Avatar* or the highest and fullest incarnation of the Lord.

## LETTER IV

### MAHA-VISHNU AND NARAYANA

I have already tried to give you some idea of the philosophy of incarnation or *avatar* in Hindu thought. I hope you have been able to seize the root idea of our doctrine of *avatar*. It is really an attempt to explain the logic of Evolution. Evolution, Max Muller says, is the evolution of an idea. Except on the hypothesis of the presence of a pre-existent Idea or Plan at the back of it, we cannot offer any intelligent interpretation of this doctrine or law of evolution. There must consequently be what is called a Regulative Idea behind the evolutionary process. In biological evolution, the type of the particular species or genus, which is evolving, constitutes this Regulative Idea. There must be some similar eternally-realized and perfected type of this universe behind this progressive cosmic evolution. Unless we assume the presence of this perfected or eternally-realized type of this universe, cosmic evolution can have no rational meaning. We call Evolution a law. But there can be no law without an aim or end. Cosmic evolution must have, therefore, at its



back a perfect cosmos. You may, if you like, call it a perfected cosmic idea or ideal. But idea implies a person. An idea must be the idea of some conscious personality. The perfected cosmic idea or ideal, by its own logic, establishes the presence of a Cosmic Consciousness or a Person who holds in himself this cosmic idea. Hindu thought conceived this Cosmic Consciousness or Personality as *Maha-Vishnu*. This universe exists in the being of *Maha-Vishnu* as objects of his Thought or *Jnanam*, and Enjoyment or Love or Emotions called *Anandam* in our language.

#### NARAYANA

This *Maha-Vishnu* is also called *Narayana*. The literal meaning of the Sanskrit word *Vishnu* is all pervading, that which extends over all, enters into all, holds all and covers all. *Maha-Vishnu* is, therefore, the Force or Person, which or who holds together the universe in his consciousness. *Narayana* is derived from two words *nara* and *ayana*. *Nara* again is derived from *nara*, meaning human, and it means the collection or totality of the genus *homo*. *Ayana* means refuge or that which holds a thing or sustains a person. *Narayana* means thus that which holds

together and sustains the collective life and evolution of the human race. *Maha-Vishnu* is, therefore, the Ultimate Reality or the Absolute or, as we will call it, Brahman, viewed from the stand-point of universal or cosmic evolution. *Narayana* is the same Ultimate Reality or the Absolute or Brahman viewed, not from the stand-point of the universal or cosmic evolution, which includes, of course, human evolution also, but especially from the stand-point of Humanity. *Maha-Vishnu* is not a being or personality different from *Narayana*. Both are one and the same. Only the same Reality viewed from two different stand-points is called by two different names. And as the universe includes humans also, the special aspect in which the Ultimate Reality appears when viewed from the purely and exclusively human stand-point, must necessarily be included in the conception of it as viewed from the stand-point of the whole universe. *Narayana* is, therefore, included in *Maha-Vishnu*. But the emphasis in *Maha-Vishnu* is not on the human but on the cosmic aspect of the Ultimate Reality.

And I am anxious that you should seize these distinctions and differentiations in the conception of the Ultimate Reality to be able to clearly understand the difference in the two planes of

the *avatar* or descent of the Lord in creation, namely, the cosmic and the human planes. The series of *Yugavatars*, discussed in my last letter, starting with the *Matsya-Avatar* or the incarnation of the Lord, as you would say, as Fish, and ending with *Vamana-Avatar* or His incarnation as the Dwarf, are in a especial sense *avatars* or incarnations of *Maha-Vishnu*. The descents or *avatars* of the Lord, His incarnations, as you would say, on the plane of Humanity, proceed in a special sense from *Narayana*.

#### NARAYANA AND HUMANITY

In fact, our word for what you call Humanity with a capital "H", is *Narayana*. Most of our people conceive this Humanity as an abstraction; like, for instance, goodness or whiteness or any other abstract noun. As goodness is derived from the generalisation of whatever seems to us to be good; even so this Humanity is a generalisation of universal human qualities or a collection of all humans except as a numerical whole. This Humanity is not something concrete. But you will perhaps remember that Joseph Mazzini characterised this Humanity as a Being, and not as a mere abstract idea or generalisation. A being is a

self-conscious and self-active personality. Mazzini's Humanity is, thus, a self-conscious personality. This Humanity is present in and yet always stands differentiated from individual humans and groups of humans constituting social units. Individual humans as well as the various social units or racialities or nationalities are limbs and organs of this Humanity. This is exactly our conception of *Narayana*. *Narayana* is not what its root implies, a mere collection of humans, or an abstract concept, meaning the generalisation upon which all humans stand united and co-related. *Narayana* is, like Mazzini's Humanity, a Being, a self-conscious, self-regulating and self-active Person. *Narayana* represents that aspect of the Personality of the Ultimate Reality or Brahman which is revealed and realised in and through man. This *Narayana* is conceived in three aspects, namely, first, the aspect in which He stands above and beyond the process of cosmic evolution, which may be called His transcendent aspect. This is the aspect in which He is realised as established in His own being, himself both *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, differentiated from Himself to be his own object both of thought and love and volition. In this aspect *Narayana* stands above the time series. The

second aspect in which *Narayana* is viewed is as the Indweller in every human. In this aspect *Narayana* appears as *Narottama* or the Ideal Man. Literally, *Narottama* means the best man.

#### NAROTTAMA

It is the ideal end of individual human evolution, the regulative idea in personal progress. You may freely call this *Narottama* Superman. As *Narottama* or the Ideal Man, *Narayana* stands in every individual human, directing and regulating the course of individual evolution, the object of which is the production of the perfected type of humanity.

In the third aspect, *Narayana* appears as the Regulative Idea, the Power and Force that guides and shapes the course of social evolution. In this aspect *Narayana* is what your old Christian thinkers used at one time to call God in History. *Narayana* in this aspect is viewed as the Director of both national and universal historic evolution. All our *avatars* or incarnations on the human and historic or social plane, beginning with Shree Rama Chandra, the hero of the epic Ramayana, and ending with Shree Krishna, who is at once both the principal actor and the *dieu ex*

*machina* or god-outside-the-machine in the great historic drama of the Mahabharata, are *avatars* or incarnations of *Narayana* viewed in this aspect. And Shree Krishna stands highest in this series. This is why he is called *Purna-avatar* or the fullest revelation of the Lord.

#### SHREE-KRISHNA : THE GOD-MAN AND MAN-GOD

He is our God-Man or Man-God, whichever way you may prefer to put it. Both really mean the same thing. As God-Man Shree Krishna is the fullest revelation of God in man. As Man-God he is the highest realisation of man in God. And both are the same to our thought, because we do not recognise any real and impassable gulf between God and man. To us, God and man are really one.

Nor can even Christian thought entirely repudiate this view. For, do we not read in the Bible that God made man in His own image? This establishes the essential divinity of man. Man, as the image of God, must necessarily be a reproduction of Him; And is not God's reproduction really God himself—with this difference that while the original is eternally self-realised, the reproduction of it, which must mean its revelation in time, is progressively realising

itself ? Man must, therefore, really be only God-in-the-making. The perfect man is, therefore, the fullest representation or revelation of God. He must necessarily be the fullest incarnation of the Lord. It is in this sense that Hindu thought accepts and proclaims Shree Krishna as *Purna-avatar*. In him we see the complete descent of God in and as man, and the highest ascent of man into Godhead. This is how Hindu thought accepts Shree Krishna as the perfect God-Man or Man-God.

#### SHREE KRISHNA : THE PURNA-AVATAR

There are, as I have told you, numerous *avatars* or incarnations in Hinduism. But the votaries of Shree Krishna believe that he is the highest and most perfect of these *avatars*. This is why they proclaim him as *Purna-avatar* or the fullest incarnation of the Lord. This is, however, not a mere sectarian claim. There stands a systematic philosophy behind it. In the first place, it is strange that on behalf of no other *avatar* is this claim put up by their respective votaries. In the next place, the entire Hindu doctrine or philosophy of incarnation or *avatar* or descent implies a progressive series of *avatars*. Every sect or school of Hindus believes, for ins-

tance, in all the *avatars* mentioned in the sacred books. Yet all do not worship all these *avatars*, except in a very general way. And this progressive series, by its very logic, implies that some time, somewhere, it must reach its finale or perfection. The votaries of Shree Krishna only carry this necessary logic to its conclusion and say that the descent or *avatar* of the Lord attained its finale and perfection in him. The other *avatars* revealed some partial aspects of the Lord, but Shree Krishna revealed, and represents therefore, the fullness of the Life, Light, Beauty and Power of the Lord. The logic of partial descent or *avatar* is complete or full as perfect descent or *Purna-avatar*. In Shree Krishna this necessary logic of the Hindu doctrine or philosophy of *avatar* or incarnation has been realised and demonstrated. This is the Vaishnavic position.



## LETTER V

### THE TWO DOMINANT SCHOOLS OF HINDU THOUGHT

To clearly understand this position, we shall have to pause for a moment and pass in review the two dominant schools of Hindu thought, namely, what has been called the Samkara-Vedanta and what is known as Vaishnava-Vedanta schools, because the fundamental conception of incarnation or *avatar* differs very widely as between these two schools. Vedanta is another name for the Upanishads.

They are also sometimes called *Aranyakas*, because they are believed to have been expounded in the ancient forest retreats of Hindustan where our ancient sages and seers and devotees retired in their old age to devote themselves entirely to the contemplative life, spending their days in meditation and the pursuit of the knowledge of Brahman. Life in these forest retreats was in no sense, however, monastic. The authors or expounders of these Upanishads were not religious mendicants who had entirely abjured the world or the duties and enjoyments of the domestic or social life. Most of them lived with their wives. Some of the teachers of these Upa-

nishads were even reigning monarchs, like king Janaka of Mithila, for instance, who without retiring from active social duties, lived, however, in perfect detachment from all vulgar entanglements or enjoyments and discharged the duties of their station without the least little desire for enjoying the fruits thereof. These Upanishads are the repositories of the sacred wisdom of ancient India. They are the records of the Hindu's search after the Ultimate Reality. These Upanishads form the end or concluding portions of the Vedas. These are, therefore, called Vedantas the '*anta*' in Sanskrit meaning the end. As parts of the Vedas, these Upanishads hold the same position as scriptural authority in Hinduism as the Vedas themselves. The Vedas, as you know, are divided into three sections ; first, the texts forming what are called the Samhitas ; second, what are called the Brahmanas ; and third, the Upanishads. The first contains the holy *mantrams* or texts used in sacrifices ; the second contains rules, directions and details of the rituals wherein these texts are used ; while the third, or the Upanishads, contain dissertations on Brahman, and the means of attaining the knowledge of Brahman, through which alone can salvation be found. Sacrifices lead to heaven. But these do not and can never give salvation.

This is the accepted Hindu view. Knowledge of Brahman alone can bring about the emancipation of the soul from the bondage of *samsara* or the cycle of phenomenal existence. The Upanishads, therefore, constitute the foundations of that knowledge through which *moksha* or salvation comes. But these Upanishads are many ; and there is not always clear agreement between them all. These divergences and conflicts in the teachings of the Upanishads called, therefore, for a rational exegesis of their meaning and some law or principle of interpretation that will reconcile them with one another. This work was done by what are known as the Brahma-Sutras, called also the Vedanta-Sutras. These are also called Badarayana Sutras from the name of their author, Badarayana Vyasa. The Vedas, the Upanishads and these Brahma-Sutras form the universally accepted scriptural authorities of Hinduism. Every sect and school of Hindus has, therefore, sought to build up its sectarian philosophy and law upon its own interpretation of these authorities. Thus Samkara-Vedanta means the interpretation which the great Samkara, the practical founder of the Hindu School of Absolute Monism or *Vishuddhadvaitavada*, has put upon the teachings of the Upanishads or the Vedantas regarding Brahman and the way

to that knowledge of Brahman from which alone can salvation come. The Vaishnava schools have also done the same thing ; they have sought to interpret the Vedas and the Upanishads in their own way, and by these interpretations they have tried to preserve the authority of these scriptures without abandoning their own convictions or judgment. In this way two great and rival schools have grown that practically divide Hinduism into two broad thought-currents. To understand the ground and basis of the claims of the Vaishnavas that Shree Krishna is the highest and fullest revelation of God, the most perfect *avatar* or incarnation, we shall have to briefly study these two schools of Hindu thought.

Now, both these schools accept Brahman, who is One-without-a-Second, as the Ultimate Reality. But they differ very materially as regards their conception of the 'nature' of Brahman or the Ultimate Reality. Brahman is *Satyam* or self-existent, *Jnanam* or self-conscious, *Anantam* or infinite and eternal, that is, beyond space and time, and *Anandam* or eternally self-realised. So far also both these schools are in complete agreement. Both agree in attributing absolute unity of being to Brahman. Brahman is *Ekamevadcitiyam* or One-without-a-

Second. But they differ in their interpretations of this unity of the being of Brahman. Samkara-Vedanta holds that the unity of Brahman is an absolute and undifferentiated unity. Vaishnava-Vedanta proclaims that the unity of Brahman is not undifferentiated but self-differentiated unity. According to the Samkara-Vedanta school, Brahman is without any note or mark. The Vaishnava-Vedanta school holds that by an act of eternal self-differentiation Brahman creates notes and marks within Himself, becomes the object of His own thought or knowledge and thus realises His self-consciousness. Similarly, by the same act of self-differentiation Brahman becomes the object of His own *Anandam* or enjoyment and thus realises His own love or joy. The Samkara-Vedanta denies these differentiations in the being of the Absolute. According to the Samkara-Vedanta school, Brahman being without any differentiation or duality cannot possibly be the cause of this world. Every cause undergoes a necessary change in producing the effect. If Brahman be the cause of the universe, then in producing this effect, He must be undergoing perpetual transformations. These transformations would destroy His character as the Eternal and the Unchangeable. According to this school the world-process is, therefore,

illusory. It seems to be real, but really it is not so. The one Reality is Brahman, and Brahman admits of no change. This changing world cannot, therefore, be real or true. It is the creation of ignorance. Just as when we mistake the mother of pearl for silver, our knowledge is not true, or when we fancy a piece of rope to be a serpent our perception is unreal and proceeds from want of right knowledge, even so, our impression that this phenomenal world is something real is illusory, proceeds from want of right knowledge. According to this school Brahman being undifferentiated Unity admits of no self-revelation in and through the world-process. There is no room, therefore, in this school of Hindu thought for any *avatar*. *Avatars*, like all things else in creation, are mere appearance. They too, like this world-process, are the creation of that mystery of the Being of Brahman which is called *Maya*. This *Maya* means the power which brings that about which can never really be. Brahman, as I have told you, cannot be the cause of this universe. Yet this world-process cannot be accounted for unless it proceeds from Brahman. To avoid, therefore, this difficulty, namely, the contradiction in thought between the causality of Brahman and His unchangeable character, Samkara-Vedantic

thought took its shelter behind the hypothesis of *Maya*, the mystery of Brahman which brings that about which really can never come to be. This *Maya* is responsible for the world-process, and also for what people call incarnations or *avatars*. These *avatars* are as much illusory as the world itself. The *avatars* are not real, though they appear to be so. You will remember the controversy in the early Christian Church concerning Christ ; whether his life and movement among the Jews in Galilee were only apparent or real. We have the same conflict in Hinduism also, regarding Shree Krishna and the other *avatars* and incarnations. And Samkara has declared the descent or *avatar* of Shree Krishna as only appreant, but not real. It is *magic*, to quote his own word.

Vaishnava-Vedanta, however, accepts the reality of both the world-process and the *avatar* or incarnation of the Lord. It argues that there can be no *jnanam* or knowledge or self-consciousness without first, a knower or subject and second, something to know or an object. We become conscious of ourselves through the establishment of this subject-and-object relation, that is, by knowing something as our object ; when you posit *jnanam* or knowledge or thought or self-consciousness in Brahman or the

Ultimate Reality, you accept that there is this subject-and-object relation in Brahman also. Brahman realises His own consciousness or *jnanam* by Himself becoming the object of His own knowledge or thought. He is Himself the knower and Himself the object of His knowledge. As knower Brahman is *Purusha*, as the object of His knowledge Brahman is *Prakriti*. And the process of thought or knowledge is a process of the appearance of difference in unity and the perfection of unity through difference. The same remark applies in the case of the self-enjoyment of Brahman. *Anandam* implies the relation of the enjoyer and the object of his enjoyment. And here also there is the same process of unity in difference and difference in unity. On this analysis of consciousness Vaishnava-Vedanta takes its stand and proclaims the reality of both unity and differentiation in Brahman. Brahman or the Absolute stands to Himself as the object of His own knowledge and love, through an eternal process of self-differentiation. To adopt a familiar Hegelian formula, Brahman or the Absolute perpetually separates Himself from Himself to return to Himself to be Himself. This world-process is, therefore, not an illusion, but a reality,—only its reality is not in itself but is derived from the reality of the



process of thought and love in the being of the Absolute. In this world-process also the same formula equally obtains. This process is due to the self-differentiation of the Lord. Here also the Lord separates Himself from Himself to return to Himself to be Himself. And this act of the Lord's separating Himself from Himself may well be called an act of His descent or *avatar*. He comes down from Himself, so to say, to go back to Himself. The object of his *avatar* or incarnation or descent is by separating Himself from Himself to objectify Himself to Himself; and this purpose is fully realised only when His differentiated self or his *avatar* or incarnation becomes as perfect as Himself. The highest *avatar*, therefore, is he who reveals the Life, Light and Love of the Lord in their fullest measure and highest perfection. Shree Krishna, according to the Vaishnavas, has done so, and is, therefore, called *Purna-avatar*.

## LETTER VI

### VAISHNAVIC DOCTRINE OF TRINITY

To the Hindu worshippers of Shree Krishna, he is not merely an *avatar* or incarnation of the Lord, nor even only the highest and most perfect of His multitudinous *avatars* or incarnations, but is the very Lord Himself. There is nothing like it in the Christian philosophy of incarnation. The Son, though the very God of God, is still not the Father. But in our Vaishnavic thought, Shree Krishna is God or the Supreme Lord Himself. Our Vaishnavas, particularly of the Bengal school, proclaim Shree Krishna to be *Bhagavan* Himself.

You have nothing corresponding to this concept *Bhagavan* in your thought or language. This *Bhagavan* cannot be rendered in English or in any other European language. To understand the full meaning and significance of this term *Bhagavan*, as applied to Shree Krishna by his votaries, you will have to study and understand the Vaishnavic doctrine of the Trinity; for, as I told you in passing in a previous letter, there is a kind of Trinity in Vaishnavic thought

also, which is, in some respects, similar to your Christian doctrine or dogma. This similarity should not, however, lead you to think that our people borrowed it from Christianity. In the first place, our Vaishnavic Trinity, if we may really call it by this name, is clearly a development of our old, old theory of Brahman, which is found in pre-Buddhistic Upanishads, and is, therefore, pre-Christian. The fact of the matter is, that the human mind standing face to face with the same world-problems arrived more or less at the same conclusions.

#### VAISHNAVIC TRINITY

The Bhagavata is the special scripture of our Vaishnavas. They call it the Fifth Veda. This Bhagavata proclaims this Vaishnavic Trinity in the following couplet :

*Vadanti tat-tattaridastattvam yaj-jnanamadvayam  
Brahmeti Paramatmeti Bhagavaniti sharddyate*

It means that those who know the *Tattva*, call that One-and-Undivided and Indivisible Consciousness as *Tattva*, which goes by the name of Brahman, Paramatman and *Bhagavan*.

These three, Brahman, Paramatman and *Bhagavan*, constitute what I have called the Vaishnavic Trinity. These are not, however,

three persons, like the three parts of the Christian Trinity ; but are only three names of one and the same Reality, called *Tattva* in our language.

What is '*Tattva*' ? That is the first question which will arise in your mind here. This word *Tattva* has nothing corresponding to it in your language. The nearest approach to it is what may be called the Ultimate Reality. But you must realise the process of thought which called this word into existence in our language to be able to clearly seize its meaning and significance. In ordinary parlance *Tattva* means information, or that which we want to know. *Tattva* thus means that which reveals the object of any enquiry. Here, in this text of the Bhagavata, *Tattva* means that which answers the riddle of the universe. It means that which being known (as our Upanishads declare) nothing else remains to be known ; that which being found nothing remains to seek.

#### SOURCE OF CREATIVE PROCESS

The fundamental enquiry in creation is— Whence is this world ? This is the first query of the human mind as it stands face to face with this creative process, where it sees objects that were not before coming into existence before

its very eyes. How do things that thus come into existence, continue to exist ? That is the next query. And where do things that are now pass away at death or dissolution ? That is the third query. And our people gave the name of '*Tattva*' to that which answered this riddle of the universe, these universal problems before the human mind. You find in the Upanishads that this *Tattva* is called Brahman. Bhrigu, the son of the sage Varuna, we read in the Taïttiriya Upanishad, went to his father and prayed to be taught the knowledge of Brahman. And Varuna replied : "That from which all objects have come into being ; That by which after coming into being all objects continue to be ; That towards which all objects move and into which they enter at the final dissolution ; seek thou to know That, That is Brahman." *Tattva* thus means, you will see, what may be called the Ultimate Reality in your language.

In the couplet the Bhagavata says that those who know the *Tattva* know it as One Undivided and Indivisible Consciousness. This is the meaning of what is described as *Advaya Jnanam*. *Advaya* means without duality, and *Jnanam* means knowledge or consciousness. Those who know the *Tattva* or the Ultimate Reality call that *Tattva*

which is One and Undivided Consciousness. This is the meaning of the first line of the couplet.

Now, why is this *Tattva* described as One and Undivided Consciousness? Because the evidence of existence is consciousness. When I say that a thing exists I declare that I know it to exist. In other words, it exists because it is an object of my knowledge or consciousness. When I say that this world exists, I mean really that I am conscious of its existence; in other words, that it exists in my consciousness. All things thus exist in consciousness, in 'some' consciousness. But whose consciousness? They do not exist really in my consciousness, because I am sometimes unconscious. These cannot exist in the consciousness of other humans, because there was a time when there was no human on this earth, and yet this outer sidereal kingdom did exist, and this terrestrial world as well. This universe is endless in time and without limit in space. Our consciousness is limited both by time and space. The consciousness in which this universe exists cannot be our consciousness. It is a consciousness that is beyond both time and space. It must be infinite. The consciousness that holds this eternal procession of objects and phenomena, which we call this world, cannot also be a consciousness that is broken or interrupted,

because that would mean a break in this procession, which we neither see nor can ever conceive. The consciousness in which all things exist must, therefore, be an unbroken and uninterrupted consciousness. Consciousness proceeds from the relation of subject and object. I become conscious of myself through my object. When there is no object of thought or consciousness before me, I lose my consciousness. Unbroken consciousness implies that the object through which the subject realises himself is eternally present before him. In other words, this consciousness cannot have anything outside itself for its own object ; or here the subject must be its own object. To use philosophical terms, it means that the unbroken consciousness which holds together the eternal procession of phenomena must be absolute consciousness, or the Absolute. This absolute consciousness is described in the text of the Bhagavata as *Advaya-Jnanam*. It means that the subject and the object which produce consciousness are one and undivided. This *Advaya-Jnanam* is known as *Tattva*. This is the full meaning and import of the first line of this couplet.

And in the second line we are told that this *Advaya-Jnanam* which is known as *Tattva* or the final answer to the riddle of the universe, is called

by three names, namely, Brahman, Paramatman and *Bhagavan*. These three—Brahman, Paramatman and *Bhagavan* are thus not three entities nor even three persons—one in essence but different in appearance, but only three names or three aspects of the one and the same Undivided and Indivisible Consciousness in which we find the ultimate solution of the problem of life and thought.

### THREE TERMS OF ONE UNDIVIDED CONSCIOUSNESS

These three terms Brahman, Paramatman and *Bhagavan* form the master-key to Hindu thought. If you can grasp the real meaning and significance of these three terms, you will find your way easy into the profoundest mysteries of our thought and culture. These will also open to you the truth and reality of the philosophy of Shree Krishna.

These three terms relate to three orders or planes of universal human experience and are an answer to the fundamental query which these three orders of experience raise. These three orders are—(i) the outer cosmic order, (ii) the inner mental order, and (iii) the human social order which is, in a sense, the fulfilment of both the outer cosmic and the inner mental orders.



The Ultimate Reality wherein we seek and find a final answer to all our queries regarding these three orders of our experience is called *Tattva*. This *Tattva* is of the nature of Undivided and Indivisible Consciousness. When viewed in and through our experiences of outer cosmic phenomena this *Tattva* is called by the name of Brahman. The same *Tattva* when viewed in and through our inner mental experiences is called Paramatman. And the same *Tattva* viewed in and through the multitudinous experiences of our relations with other humans in society is called *Bhagavan*. This is the full meaning of the couplet from the Bhagavata quoted above. Here you will find the correct statement and interpretation of the Hindu doctrine of what may be called the 'Trinity'.

#### ORIGIN OF GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS

Man's first consciousness of himself comes in and through his contact and conflict with his outer nature environments. His earliest God-consciousness quickens sense of the supernatural and the supersensuous. Our earliest sense of the supernatural and the supersensuous comes really from our sense-contacts and sense-experiences of the outer physical world. Religious consciousness

grows first from our experiences of the phenomena of earth and sky. The vast expanse of the heavens above, the movements of what are called the heavenly bodies therein, the regular rising and setting of the sun, the appearance of the stars studding the blue bosom of the heavens with the approach of night, the periodic growth and ebb of the phases of the moon, the movements of the winds, the weird phenomena of the morning and the evening twilight, the rushing flow of waters along river-beds carrying the produce of one place to other distant places and fertilising nature and also mind by the circulation of life-giving and soul-illuminating knowledge and wisdom along their banks,—all these are the contents of the early God-consciousness of man as found in our Vedas, believed to be the earliest preserved records of the Indo-Aryan branch of the great human family. And it was really from their contemplation of these Nature-Deities, as the Vedic gods and goddesses have sometimes been justly called, that our ancient forefathers gradually rose to their first consciousness of the Ultimate Reality as Brahman. At first our early Vedic ancestors took an empirical and isolated view of the various forces and potencies which they conceived standing behind natural

phenomena and responsible for their manifestation. The sun, the sky or the heavens holding the clouds and the thunderbolt, the storm winds, the heavenly twins, the Asvins or the Asvinikumaras, Sarasvatee, the great watercourse which flowed through the Aryan settlements, and fire in its manifold aspects of jungle-fire that shaved the face of the earth in the twinkling of the eye and rendered it fit for human habitation, and the household fire required for household service and religious sacrifices, the fire that seemed at once so lovely and so dreadful, that moved from place to place with the speed of the warrior riding a swift horse, that appeared mysteriously before the worshipper as he rubbed the two parts of the fire-drill—first as flickering sparks and gradually as full-blown flame ;—all these were the earliest gods of our ancient Vedic pantheon. Here we really see in some sense the very birth of man's God-consciousness.

Gradually, however, the simple and unsophisticated Vedic mind commenced to realise the error of conceiving these different nature-forces or phenomena or natural objects as isolated entities, and thus rose to a sense of the "One Truth or Reality, called by the wise by different names,—Indra, Varuna, Gadutmat, etc." The text of the tenth *mandala* or circle of the

sacred texts of the Rig-Veda is the earliest indication of the attempt of the Vedic mind to work out some sort of a synthesis or unity between the multiplicity of its first outer sense-experiences and earliest God-consciousness. This first sensing of unity in the endless diversities of the phenomena of nature about the Vedic worshippers did not receive any specific name. It was simply indicated as the *Ekam Sat* or the One Truth or Reality. This idea was clarified and defined in the later thoughts and speculations of the Vedic Hindus, as recorded in the Upanishads. Here we find this *Ekam Sat* or the One Truth or Reality called Brahman. This is how the concept Brahman first came to grow.

#### LITERAL MEANING OF BRAHMAN

The literal meaning of Brahman is large. It is derived from the root *Brinha* meaning large or immense. No metaphysical or philosophical concept was, therefore, at first conveyed by this word Brahman. It meant only that which is large, immense, which covers and holds all things.

We read, for instance, in the Atharva-Veda of Varuna, which was really the Vedic name for the immensity of the blue sky overhead, that

where two persons meet Varuna is the unseen third between them ; where three persons meet Varuna is the fourth among them ; where four people meet Varuna is the ever-present fifth. Though we interpret this text now as indicative of the unseen presence of the Infinite Brahman, those who first composed and used this text understood by Varuna here only this visible expanse of blue overhead which overlooks all, enters into all, and covers all things and is thus the unseen presence in every company of humans. We read in another text that Varuna is all-knowing. Varuna counts the feathers of the birds that fly in the sky, Varuna sees the ships that sail in the far distant oceans. There was no supernatural or metaphysical or philosophical concept at first associated with Varuna. The earliest conception of Varuna was transferred to the term Brahman, which meant, as its root implies, simply that which is large or immense. Brahman gradually came in course of the evolution of our religious or metaphysical or philosophical consciousness to mean the highest generalisation or synthesis of outer cosmic phenomena. The Taittiriya Upanishad defines Brahman, as I have already told you, as "That from which all objects come into being ; coming into being, That by which all objects

continue to be ; towards which all objects move (in course of this cosmic evolution) and into which all objects enter at the final dissolution. That is Brahman."

#### INDO-ARYAN AGNOSTICISM

You will see that here we do not get any definite knowledge of Brahman. Brahman is here presented in the terms of what is called  $X$  in Algebra,—an unknown quantity. The earliest theory of Brahman, when the concept rises to the metaphysical or philosophical plane, is thus really an agnostic theory. There is an unmistakable note of this agnosticism in our earlier Upanishads. This agnosticism is not very different from the modern agnostic speculations. Some of these Upanishads, in fact, openly proclaim that Brahman is both Unknown and Unknowable. "We do not know Brahman ; Brahman is different both from all that we know and from all that we do not know." It means that we cannot cognise Him by our senses or our mind directly ; nor can we realise Brahman through the process of deduction or induction, the process by which we say that a thing either exists or that it does not exist. That to which we deny existence is of the category of the unknown ; that to which we

assign existence, falls within the range of the known. In this sense Brahman is different from that which is known and above that which is unknown. "All that you can say of Brahman is that Brahman exists. You cannot attribute anything else except pure existence to Brahman. We know not Brahman : we do not know how to teach about Brahman. This is what we have heard from those ancient teachers who have taught as about Brahman." And again, "He who says that he knows Brahman, knows not Brahman. He who says that he neither knows Brahman nor does not know Brahman, truly knows Brahman." This is the fundamental philosophy of Brahman in the earliest Upanishads. "Brahman exists : how can Brahman be comprehended ?" This is the last word about Brahman in these early speculations of the Indo-Aryan mind. It represents really the first synthesis of the cosmic life and phenomena attempted by the Indo-Aryan consciousness. Brahman is the Element of Permanence behind the endless changes of cosmic life and phenomena.

Man, standing before this outer cosmic procession, asked himself—whence do these things that were not before come to be now ? And his answer to this query was—It is Brahman. The next query was—where do

objects pass away, at death; for instance, or during frightful cosmic convulsions that result in disappearance of vast continents and the appearance of new ones? Here also the same answer came—it is Brahman. This is how Brahman came to be the Ultimate Reality, the One Truth or the One Element of Permanence in and behind the endless procession of cosmic life and phenomena. Brahman is that which is Permanent in and through the changes which we observe about us in outer cosmic life and phenomena. This is the earliest view of Brahman in the Upanishads. Brahman here is really the Unknown and Unknowable First Cause. We first recognise this Brahman in the logic of our experience and knowledge of the outer objective world about us. Brahman here is really what may be called a Logical Necessity. We have no direct cognition of this Brahman. It is Unknown and Unknowable.

#### PARAMATMAN—THE OVER-SOUL

But when leaving the outer world of matter and sense, we turn our thoughts upon our inner life and experience, we find ourselves face to face with a similar problem. Here also we observe a continuous procession of phenomena,



an uninterrupted chain of changes. We seek to analyse our sense-experiences, and find here the same continuous flux which we observed in outer cosmic life and phenomena. Our vision of things is composed of a series of passing pictures. Our hearing of sounds is a similar series of passing sensations. And so on and so forth in regard to every other kind of our sense-impressions or sense-knowledge. And the same query rises here also—what is that which holds together these passing sense-impressions and thus renders sense-knowledge possible? Recognising the true character of the operation of the senses, and seeing that none of these senses really know things themselves, our ancient seers raised the question : By whom is the mind directed when it falls upon its objects? By whom is the eye joined to the ear? What is the god who controls the movements of the vital airs and thus renders the phenomena of life in us possible? And the answer was, it is That which is the Eye of the eyes, the Ear of the ears, the Life of the vital airs, the Mind of the mind. This is how the riddle of our sense-life and thought-life, the problem of our inner self-consciousness, was sought to be solved by our ancients. That which is the Eye of our eyes, the Ear of our ears, the Life of the vital airs, the Mind of our mind, the

Life of our life, in whom we live, move and have our being, as your own books say, is Paramatman. The word occurs in the Upanishads ; and there it is used as a synonym of Brahman. The Upanishads describe Brahman as the Soul, inset in the deepest depths of the consciousness of all sentient or living creatures. But the concept was fully developed by the *Yogees* or those who sought spiritual union with the Supreme Being in and through deep meditation, wherein the soul or self having completely withdrawn itself from all outer sense-activities, stood "alone" upon its own being. The Paramatman who is thus realised in the deepest depths of our being, as the Soul of our soul, the witness to all the changes within us, is the self-same Truth or Reality which, viewed in and through our experience of outer cosmic phenomena, is called Brahman. But viewed not through outer cosmic life and phenomena but in and through the phenomena of our sense-life and our mental experiences and operations, the same Truth or Reality is called Paramatman, rendered in English as the Indweller. Brahman is the basis of the unity of cosmic life and phenomena. Paramatman is the basis of the unity of our inner mental life. It is what is conceived as the Holy Ghost in the Christian Trinity. Brahman may

be characterised as the Cosmic Soul. Paramatman is the Over-Soul, as Emerson calls it, in individual human consciousness. Brahman is the solution of the riddle of the external, objective cosmic world. Paramatman is the solution of the riddle of the inner life of individual humans.

#### THE CONCEPT BHAGAVAN

There is yet another order of experience, namely, man's experience of other humans, in and through his varied social relations. This order of experience is different equally from our experiences of outer cosmic order and from our experiences of our own inner life, whether sensuous or supersensuous. Yet at the same time we find in our relations with other humans a meaning and value of both our outer cosmic and our inner mental and emotional life, which we do not find in them when viewed apart from this social order. This social order is in some sense the final fruition and fulfilment of both the cosmic and the inner mental or individual or personal life. And that which solves the riddle of this social life, this play and interplay of different human personalities which is constantly illumining both our sense of the life of Nature and our consciousness of our inner mental or

spiritual life,—is called *Bhagavan*. Brahman is the synthesis of our cosmic experiences. Paramatman is the synthesis of our inner mental, emotional and spiritual experiences. *Bhagavan* is the synthesis of our social experiences. It is the name of the same One and Undivided Consciousness that holds together the series of cosmic phenomena and evolution, and that holds together equally the evolution of our inner mental life, and that holds together also the evolution of man in society.

But I must defer fuller consideration of the concept *Bhagavan*, which has nothing similar to it in the thoughts and speculations of your people, to my next letter.

## LETTER VII

### PARAMATMAN

You say that you find it much easier to grasp the concept Brahman than either Paramatman or *Bhagavan*. I knew you would. And the reason of it is the close similarity between our conception of Brahman and the prevailing agnosticism of modern European thought. What you call your theism is really built upon faith, and not upon such analysis of thought as your thinkers have so far been able to make. The most consistent of your modern philosophers or thinkers have been therefore practically agnostic.

### AGNOSTICISM—THE ONE HALF

Our ancients, as I told you in my last letter, like your Herbert Spencer also, proclaimed that Brahman or the Absolute, that which finds to our thought the answer to the riddle of the universe, is Unknown and Unknowable. But that was only one-half of the teachings of our old Upanishads. When our ancients declared that Brahman is Unknown and Unknowable, what

they really meant is that we may not know Brahman in the same way and with the help of the same categories by which we know all other objects. In knowing a thing we become the subject or knower, and it becomes our object. We reduce it to the forms or moulds of our thought and in the terms of these moulds of our thinking we know it. In other words, in every act of knowledge, the subject or the knower conditions his object, and is also in his turn conditioned by it. But Brahman or the Absolute cannot be so conditioned. Absolute means unconditioned. And as that which cannot be subjected to any condition, the Absolute or Brahman cannot be made an object of our knowledge or thought like other objects. This is what our ancients meant when they proclaimed that Brahman is Unknown and Unknowable.

#### GNOSTICISM—THE OTHER HALF

But, as I have said, this is only one-half of their teachings about Brahman or what you would call the Absolute. This agnosticism is only a half-truth. Your modern students and admirers of our ancient Theosophy, as found in the Upanishads and the Vedanta, particularly as

these have been interpreted by Samkara, have unfortunately missed or ignored the other half of these teachings. This open agnosticism of our Upanishads is joined to a most bold and unequivocal gnosticism also. Our ancients were at once both agnostics and gnostics. Most of your modern students of our ancient Theosophy have conveniently overlooked this gnostic aspect of the Vedanta. Brahman is Unknown and Unknowable as 'object', but as subject Brahman is as much possible of being cognised by us as our own self is. We know our own self, not as object, but only as subject. We know ourselves in knowing this world, not as our object of knowledge but only as the knower. Similarly when we know Brahman we know Him also not as our object but as the Ever-present Subject in us. This direct cognition of Brahman comes to the thinker when he is able to completely withdraw himself from not only all outer sense-objects but also from all mental or intellectual processes as well. When the eye sees not things extended in space, nor the ear hears any sound produced in the ether, nor the other senses perceive their objects, when the mind is withdrawn from all mental operations, and thought itself ceases to think, and the Pure Self or Soul, the *Atman* or what is

indicated by the first person singular "I", burns in its own light, so to say, like a light undisturbed by the least little breath of breeze, when this Self or Soul, this "I", sees and knows nothing, is cognisant of nothing except itself, in this state, which is here very crudely described by me, as I really know not what it is, and even those who have risen to this state describe it as beyond both word and thought,—there is direct cognition of Brahman. This state is called *Samadhi* in our thought-literature. It resembles outwardly sleep, but in sleep there is unconsciousness, while in *Samadhi* there is full and uninterrupted consciousness; so have I heard from those who have had experience of this state. In this state of *Samadhi* or beatific trance, Brahman is known directly, without the mediation of the universal categories of our knowledge of outer objects. This *Samadhi* forms the plinth and foundation of Hindu gnosticism. This gnosticism is the other half of the apparent agnosticism of our ancient wisdom. But this apparent agnostic note of our ancient philosophy of Brahman or the Absolute is what naturally appeals most powerfully to many modern European thinkers who find in it a support for the prevailing agnosticism or deism of their own ways of thinking.



## THEISM AND DEISM

But even those schools of Hindu thought which admit the gnosticism of the Vedanta, and acknowledge that though Brahman may not be known as we know the things of this world, that is as our object, it is possible to know Brahman directly just as we know ourselves not as object but as subject, do not accept what you would call the personality of Brahman. To them Brahman is not a person. Personality implies the same object and subject relation which is the condition of all our knowing. But in Brahman there is no duality whatever. Brahman is One-Without-a-Second, *Ekameradvitiyam*. There is nothing outside Brahman ; nor is there anything in Brahman which is different from it. Our ancients recognised two kinds of difference, namely, external and internal. This world stands outside us ; our difference with it is therefore an external difference. But there are differences between our different moods, for instance, when we know ourselves as knower of different objects or as related to different things or persons ; these differences are not external but internal ; they are differences not with things outside but in us. The Hindu schools of absolute monism do not admit either of

these two classes of differences in Brahman. There is no manner of duality between Brahman and the world ; neither is there any manner of difference within the being of Brahman as between subject and object or enjoyer and enjoyed. In Brahman there is not even the difference between a thing and its qualities or properties. And as all personality results from relations of either subject and object or enjoyer and enjoyed, in the absence of the very possibility of these or any other relation in Brahman (because relation implies duality and indeed demands a third which forms the principle of relation between its various factors), we cannot presume or posit any personality to Brahman. The Vedanta in many texts therefore does not apply the personal pronoun He or Him to Brahman but indicates Brahman by the impersonal "It". The popular philosophy of Brahman is therefore apparently deistic. Deism denies personality to God ; Theism accepts the Divine Personality. This is the difference between Theism and Deism. Advanced European thought of our time is more deistic than theistic. Indeed, it seems to me that European thought and theology have not as yet found a rational basis of the truly theistic position or of the personality of God. European Theism is essentially Christian. It is built upon

the Christian dogma of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Those Liberal Christians who have discarded the Trinitarian dogma believe in the Divine personality more from inherited bias than from any rational thinking. And the predominant deistic emphasis of modern European thought explains why you find our conception of Brahman more appealing to your reason, and easier to understand than our conception of either Paramatman or *Bhagavan*.

Brahman, as I have told you already, is the synthesis of our experiences of this outer world of matter and sense. Paramatman is the synthesis of our inner mental experiences. To seize the full meaning and significance of our concept Paramatman you will have to subject your inner life to a searching analysis. And the first thing that I would ask you to try here is to understand the mystery of your own personality, that which you are constantly referring to as your "I". Have you ever thought that there is a profound mystery in this first person singular, which is not less mysterious in any way than the universally admitted mystery of Brahman or the Absolute? You are constantly saying or thinking,

"I am thinking thus" ; "I was thinking differently before" ; "I am feeling this now" ; "I felt differently before" ; "I am doing this now" ; "I did something else before it " ; and so on and so forth. And you will be really surprised, when you think of it, how little you know and understand this thing which you are constantly speaking and thinking of as your "I".

I told you in my last letter how our ancients spoke of Brahman as that which they could not say they knew nor say did not know. And the first thing that you will discover when you seriously apply yourself to find out the truth about your "I" is the same thing, namely, that you cannot say that you know this "I" nor can you say that you do not know it. Just as all that you know of Brahman is that it is which persists in all, so you can really say of this "I" of yours as something which persists in and through all the inner and outer changes of your life. If you have read a little of biology you will perhaps say that "I started life as a protoplasmic cell in my mother's womb ; I then grew into a phœtus ; I was next born in the light of this world as a baby ; I grew from helpless babyhood to girlhood, from a girl I became a young maiden ; from maidenhood I am growing into maturity and maternity ; and so

on and so forth"—and you will relate the story of your "I". As a protoplasmic cell, you were very different from what you became later on as a phœtus ; from your babyhood you were different both physically and mentally in your girlhood ; since then you have grown much, shed many-things both physical and mental that formed the lineaments of your body and mind as a girl or a maiden just emerging into maturity of youth. You will gradually grow old and infirm and lose practically all that distinguish you to-day among your kind. But though you have changed so much during the past years of your life, and will be bound to change further as the days pass by, still you always think and speak of yourself as the same "I". The "I" that was you as a protoplasm, that was you as a phœtus, that was you as a girl and maiden, and that is you a mature woman, will remain the same as long as you are and your consciousness of yourself persists. And when you think of this "I" of yours in this procession of changes of your outer physical and inner mental or spiritual life, you discover that this "I" is the great mystery which though not only present in every change of your life but initiating these changes sometimes, still stands above these changes, is unchanged itself. In other words, this "I" of yours is not even what you

call your mind, though it is organically bound up with this mind. It is not your emotions though it is ever present in them. It is not your volition either though it seems to direct all activities and energisations. This "I" is the ever-present witness to all the changes of your life from the time when biologists tell you were a uniform and undifferentiated mass of protoplasmic cells upto the present moment when you stand revealed in the fullness of your divine womanhood. This "I" itself unchanged, has always been present in all the changes of your life. It is the light that lights your eye, it is the ear of your ear, the sense of your senses, the mind of your mind, the essence of all your emotions and the power that moves your will and your muscles to action. This "I" is both yourself and yet not yourself ; it is really of the category of the Absolute. It is taking this view of the "I" that our ancients declared "Svetaketu ! That ( i.e. Brahman ) art thou". In this view this "I" is really the Soul of your soul, and is therefore called the Paramatman or what is rendered into English as the Indweller.

## PARAMATMAN

Now, you will see that your knowledge of

this "I" of yours comes through the changes in your life. You know these changes but really you do not know this "I" in the same way as you know the changes of which this "I" is the witness. You cannot, in other words, make this "I" of yours 'object' of your knowledge ; it is known not as an object but as the subject that feels all, wills all. Your knowledge of this "I" is through direct cognition. This is just the same kind of your knowledge of Brahman or the Absolute, through direct cognition and not through the usual subject and object relation, the form or norm of our knowledge of outer material world. This "I" which is the element of permanence in the changes of your personal life, which is the witness of these changes, in and through which you know yourself as well as all other objects of your knowledge, is thus of the same category as Brahman or the Absolute. The Element of Permanence behind cosmic life and phenomena, the Witness unto the eternal procession of these phenomena, is called Brahman, as I have already told you. The same Element of Permanence in your personal life, the Witness unto the changes of your mind and body, is called Paramatman. This Paramatman is the Witness in us of the movements of our reason, our emotions and our will. It is the Eternal Consciousness that finds

the explanation of our individual or personal consciousness. It is the Ever-Present Reality behind the passing appearances of our life and thought. It exists in you and me, my child, like meaning in words, like idea in expression, like the will in all action, like life in living things. It pervades every part of our life and thought, it covers all, enters into all, holds all, and moves all. It is that in which we live, move and have our being. Therefore, it is called Paramatman or the Supreme Soul, the Indweller in your own language. It is the basis of our physical life and evolution. It is the norm of our reason and thought. It is the source and the satisfaction of our emotional life. It is the Ideal Good that we are constantly seeking, whether consciously or unconsciously, in all our activities. When you detach yourself from all outer activities, when the senses are withdrawn from all sense-objects, when the mind, called in our language the director of the senses, is withdrawn from all sense-movements, when the understanding that stands behind the mind and unifies its diverse records of sensations, is withdrawn from the mind, and when the self or the soul is withdrawn from the understanding, then it is that the true state of what is called '*Yoga*' in our thought and language is attained.



Then the self exists in its own being. Then the self becomes its own object, both of thought and enjoyment and volition. Then the individual seer sees his own personal self, the "I" that is in him, as the same as Brahman. And thus the seer sees his individual or personal soul as really of the same category as the Universal Soul or Brahman, and realising his individual soul as belonging to the same category as Brahman he calls it Paramatman. You will thus see that in the concept Paramatman Hindu thought discovered the synthesis of man's inner personal or individual life even as in Brahman it found a synthesis of outer cosmic life and phenomena.

I hope you will be able to reproduce this concept Paramatman now in your thought and enter into its real meaning and significance in our solution of the riddle of the universe.

The third term in our Vaishnavic Trinity is *Bhagavan*. But I must defer consideration of it in full to my next letter.

## LETTER VIII

### BHAGAVAN

I have tried to explain, so far as I am able to do so, two out of three terms of our Vaishnavic Trinity, namely Brahman and Paramatman. Brahman, you will remember, is practically that aspect of the Absolute which is revealed in and through cosmic life and phenomena as these are apprehended by us. Paramatman is that aspect of the Absolute which we cognise in and through our inner intellectual, emotional and volitional life. I have yet to explain, so far as I may, the actuality of experience for which the term *Bhagavan* stands.

### COSMIC AND MENTAL PHENOMENA

And the first thing that I would invite your thought to is the partial and mutual supplementary character of our experience of outer cosmic phenomena and inner mental phenomena. Our sensations, which constitute the basis of our knowledge of outer world, are dependent for their quickening and persistence or what I may call their birth and growth upon the presence of their

objects that stand apparently outside them. These objects also depend for their self-revelation, or for proving that they do really exist, upon our sensations. The senses and their objects are thus mutually inter-dependent. What we call our mind works in and through the relations that are being constantly established between our senses and the objects of the outer world. These objects upon which we are dependent for our sensations, and through these sensations, for our very self-consciousness or thought, are not our creation, they stand not only outside, but are independent of us. This self or consciousness of ours on the one side, and this outer cosmic order on the other, are, however, organically related to each other. And the question that arises here is, what is that which holds together both these elements of experience and renders their mutual relations possible? In Brahman we found an answer to the three fundamental queries that come up as we observe this outer cosmic world, the queries, namely, (1) from where do these objects come into being? (2) By what, after coming into being, do these objects continue to be? (3) Towards what do these objects move in course of their evolution and into what do these enter at the final dissolution? In Paramatman we found an answer to the riddle of

our own sense-life and the workings of our intellect, our emotions and our will or volition. But a third problem remained still unsolved, namely, what is the relation between this outer cosmic world and this inner mental or spiritual world? In other words, what is the relation in which Brahman as the Cosmic Soul stands to Paramatman as the Indweller in human personalities? We see that man and this world are mutually inter-dependent. The Cosmic Soul and the Over-Soul in men must, therefore, be equally inter-dependent upon each other. Each must supplement the other. There is an obvious relation between these two aspects of the Absolute. What is that relation? And what is the Principle of Relation between these two? The answer of our Vaishnavic thought to this question is that the Principle of Relation here is *Bhagavan*. *Bhagavan* holds together in Himself both this outer world of matter and sense on the one side and man with his inner reason, emotions and will, the elements of his inner spiritual life, on the other. In *Bhagavan* both matter and man, both the cosmic order and the spiritual order, find their fulfilment.

#### ‘AHAM’ AND ‘IDAM’

Our ancients divided all experience into two

categories, namely *Aham* and *Idam*. *Aham* is all that is referred to as 'I' or the self. *Idam* literally means 'this'. It includes everything which falls within the category of the not-self. The 'I' or the self is the subject, the knower and the thinker, the enjoyer and the agent or the worker. It is that which knows this outer world of experience, the *Idam*, and enjoys it, and works upon it, producing diverse changes in it. This 'I' or the self stands outside the *Idam* or the not-self. It is, however, constantly related to this *Idam* or the not-self. Take this *Idam* or the not-self away, and *Aham* or the self, as we know and cognise it in us, will also cease to know itself or be self-conscious. Consciousness is born of the contact and conflict of the 'I' or the self with the *Idam* or the not-self. There must, therefore, be something which is simultaneously present in the 'I' or *Aham* or the self and *Idam* or the not-self. In other words, it must be perpetually present both in this outer cosmic world of matter and the spiritual world of our self or personal or individual consciousness to render this relation of inter-dependence possible. This Something which holds together both the self and the not-self in Himself is called by the name of *Bhagavan* in our thought.

## BHAGAVAN—THE UNIVERSAL PURUSHA

Brahman, as I have said, is the synthesis of our experiences of the outer cosmic life and phenomena. Paramatman is the synthesis of the inner experiences of our mental life. *Bhagavan* is the synthesis of the mutual relation between this outer cosmic and this inner mental or spiritual order. In *Bhagavan* both these orders of experience are united and synthesised. *Bhagavan* is the Principle of Relation between what we know as the self and what we know as the not-self. *Bhagavan* is, therefore, what your philosophers call the Absolute. Brahman as the Cosmic Soul, is only a part of *Bhagavan* and reveals only a part of the reality of the Absolute. Paramatman, as the Soul in individual man, equally represents a part of the Absolute and is only another aspect of the Absolute. *Bhagavan*, who holds within Himself, as elements of His being, both this cosmic order and this spiritual human order, is the fullest revelation of the Absolute. *Bhagavan* is thus in our thought the highest category, higher than both Brahman and Paramatman. If we conceive our consciousness or the Universal Consciousness as a circle, then this circle will be found to start from a point called Brahman to pass on in its orb to a point called

Paramatman, and finally end as the orb is completed in *Bhagavan*, which is the whole and completed circle. Our Vaishnavic poet-philosophers described Brahman therefore as only the "Effulgence" of *Bhagavan*, Paramatman as a part-manifestation of the Being of *Bhagavan*. *Bhagavan* is the Whole, Bhagaban is the Absolute. *Bhagavan* is the Full and the Perfect Person. *Bhagavan* is thus the First Person in our Vaishnavic Trinity. In *Bhagavan* the process of the eternal self-differentiation of the Absolute is completed. "In the beginning the True alone was, my beloved, nothing else was that moved in this moving world. And this Undifferentiated Unity desired to differentiate Itself from Itself for this creative world-process." "He (to quote the Upanishads again) desired to be many." This is how our ancient wisdom expressed this eternal act of Self-Differentiation of the Absolute. By this act of Self-Differentiation, the Absolute became Himself His own Object, both of knowledge and enjoyment. This process of eternal Self-Differentiation which is, to use a familiar Hegelian formula, an act of the separation of the Self from Itself to return to Itself,—when completed, gave us the concept *Bhagavan*. In *Bhagavan* the Absolute or Brahman found fullness and completion as a Person. *Bhagavan* is the Supreme Person, or the Universal

*Purusha* as our people would say. The concept *Bhagavan* in the Hindu's philosophy gives us what you call the Personality of God.

This question of the Divine Personality is a deep mystery to your thought. Modern European thought finds it very difficult to solve this mystery, and many people accept it either on what they call the moral argument, or upon mere faith. But I am confident that you will find in our concept *Bhagavan* a real rational basis of your faith in the Personality of God.

#### SOUL OF OUR SOUL

Personality implies differentiation. We realise our personality in and through our relations with the numerous objects of our thought and affections or enjoyment or what is called *anandam* in Sanskrit. Mere existence is impersonal. Brahman of whom, as I told you in my last letter, we are able to posit nothing except pure existence or self-existence, which is therefore both unknown and unknowable in the Spenserian sense, is impersonal. Our ancients did not posit personality in Brahman. The same remark applies also to Paramatman or the Indweller. We cognise Paramatman as the Soul of our soul, the ever present Witness of the flow or flux of our



rational and emotional and volitional activities. It is only in the terms of these inner movements of our thought and emotions, as the logic of these, that we are able to realise this Paramatman. He is the Eye of our eyes, the Ear of our ears, the Life of our vital airs ; the Source and Satisfaction of our inner faculties and outer activities. It is by concentrating our thought on the logic of our inner life that we are able to realise what Paramatman really is. The way to the realisation of Paramatman is, as the Upanishads declare, through repudiation of all conceits of ownership over or ownness with our outer senses or inner thought-movements. I see things with these eyes not by my own power but by the power of That which is the Eye of my eyes ; I hear these sounds not by my own power but by the power of That which is the Ear of my ears ; and I think my thoughts not really by my own power but by the power of That which is the Thinker in me ; and so on and so forth. By this method of what may be called self-abstraction, by constantly joining our individual life and activities to the Power that is in us, perpetually standing not only as the witness of the drama of our lives but also as what in the language of the ancient dramatists might be called the *Dei-ex-Machina* or the god outside the machine, in this world and

mysterious life-drama that we realise Paramatman. Here also in and as Paramatman we hardly find God as a Person. We cannot say of Paramatman that it is unknown and unknowable; neither can we confidently say that we know Paramatman as we know any other thing or person in the universe. Brahman is, as I told you, really the logic of our experiences of outer cosmic life; and Paramatman too is similarly the logic of our experiences of our individual or personal life and activities, both sensuous and supersensuous. There is therefore an inevitable note of abstraction in both Brahman and Paramatman. It is in and as *Bhagavan* alone that we are able to seize the truth of the Divine Personality. Here in and as *Bhagavan* we realise the Absolute as a Person even as we ourselves or other humans are persons, with this difference that while our personalities are subordinate and relative, the Personality of *Bhagavan* is absolute and independent or more correctly self-dependent. Therefore *Bhagavan* may be called the Absolute Personality. How it is so, is very clearly revealed in the very term *Bhagavan*. If you can seize the meaning of this term, you will find no difficulty in seizing the great truth which this word *Bhagavan* conveys.

## BHAGAVAN

The term *Bhagavan* is made of two Sanskrit words, *Bhaga* and *Van*. The suffix *Van* implies possession or permeation. The man whose whole being is permeated with wisdom or knowledge is called *Vidvan*; *Vid* meaning wisdom from *vid* to know. The man who is permeated with all good qualities is called *Gunavan*, *Guna* meaning good qualities. *Bhagavan* means thus one who possesses *Bhaga* or more correctly the *Bhagas*, for the word *Bhaga* is a collective noun meaning six qualities or properties. Hindu tradition enumerates six things as *Bhagas*, namely, wealth, virility, good repute, attractiveness, wisdom and dis-attachment.

## SIX BHAGAS

The first *Bhaga* is *aishvarya*. The literal meaning of *aishvarya* is all that constitutes lordship or lordliness. It is derived from the Sanskrit *Iscara*, which is itself derived from the root *Eet* or *Eesh* meaning direction and control. Literally *Iscara* means therefore director or controller, thence the Director or Controller of the Universe, under whose direction this world-process moves on to its appointed end. *Aishvarya* means thus

the quality of lordship. The word is here qualified by the adjective *samagra*. This adjective qualifies every one of the *Bhagas* enumerated here. *Samagra* means entire, from beginning to end. All the *aishvaryas* from beginning to end constitute here *Ibhaga* number one.

The ordinary meaning of *aishvarya* is wealth and possessions. Our wealth and possessions are composed of the things of this world. These worldly things are the various objects of our senses. This whole universe is really composed of sense-objects. Our senses discharge a dual function, namely, they bring us knowledge of things, and they enable us to work or fashion things to our own ends. The senses were thus classified by our ancients as (1) the organs of knowledge, and (2) organs of work. The former are called *jnanendriyas*. *Jnana*, as I have told you, means knowledge and *indriya* means organ or sense. These *jnanendriyas* are five, (a) the eye, (b) the ear, (c) the nose, (d) the touch, and (e) the palate. Through these five senses we come to know the five properties of matter, namely their form, their sound, their touch—whether they are soft or hard or warm or cold—their odour, and their taste. A psychological analysis of this outer cosmic world gives us thus the five essential elements of it, namely, *rupa*

or form, *shabda* or sound, *sparsha* or touch, *rassa* or taste, and *gandha* or smell. These five sense-perceptions are the constituent elements of this outer world of sense and matter. These constitute really all our wealth or possessions.

The senses have another function, namely, that of operating upon materials to produce desired results. The organs which discharge this function are called *karmendriyas*. *Karma* means work, *indriya* means organ. The hand, the foot, the mouth, these are the organs of work. The generative organ and the rectum are also classed with these to constitute the five *Karmendriyas* or organs of work. These ten organs are the instruments and vehicles with which we have been endowed for knowing and controlling the movements of this outer cosmic world. And as both knowing and controlling give us the sense of mastery over this world, these organs are the instruments of our lordship over it. These senses or organs perform also a third function, namely, they are also the avenues of our enjoyment of this outer world. This enjoyment also gives us the sense of lordship over this world. All these follow logically from an analysis of our senses and our sense-objects.

And when you read the term *aishvarya* in the light of all this, you find that really *aishvarya*

means the things of this cosmic world, the numerous objects of our senses. These are really our wealth and possessions. It is these and our lordship over them which make us the lords of earth. Our possessions or the objects of our senses are limited. We cannot possess the entire body of sense-objects with our senses. An infinitude of objects always remain beyond our knowledge and our operation. But the word *aishvarya* is qualified by the adjective *samagra* or entire,—from beginning to end. The object of our senses do not cover the entire sense-world from beginning to end. Our limited wealth and possessions therefore do not really constitute *Bhaga* in the sense in which it is used in this context. We cannot therefore claim the epithet *Bhagavan*, though the term is applied by us to our saints and sages. But of this I must speak later on, and explain the justification of this usage.

*Aaishvarya* thus means, as you will see, really the entire body of sense-objects. These objects depend for their value really upon the power or capacity of our senses to apprehend and control and enjoy them. Things of beauty are a joy for ever only to him who has the full power of the use of his eyes. These have no meaning and worth, indeed these do not at all exist for the

blind. These are not and cannot be counted as wealth and possessions or *aishvarya* to him who has not the full use of his eyes. Similarly the sweetest sounds that thrill us with a sensation which carries us beyond our coarse-fibred physical being upto the most subtle and sublime consciousness of the super-sensuous and the spiritual, have no meaning and value, indeed really no existence, to the deaf. The softest touch that vibrates through our nerves into the deepest depths of our soul-consciousness which melts the body into the emotions and the spiritual currents of our being has no meaning and value to the paralytic ; and so on and so forth. You will find at the final analysis that all our so-called wealth or possessions, our *aishvaryas* are dependent for their existence, their meaning and their value, upon the strength and virility of our senses. This strength and virility goes by the name of *Veerya* in Sanskrit. *Aishvarya* and *Veerya* are thus organically bound up together as correlated to each other. *Aishvarya* requires *Veerya* for its self-fulfilment, and *Veerya* needs *Aishvarya* for its self-realisation. Therefore it is that next after *Aishvarya* this *Veerya* is counted as a *Bhaga* in this text. And here also the adjective *Samagra* is added to indicate the infinity of the power of the senses to hold, to control and to enjoy the

entire body of sense-objects. *Bhagavan* is He Who holds within His own Being the entire body of sense-objects and has infinite capacity of the instruments and vehicles of sense-knowledge and sense-control and sense-enjoyment in Him.

In plain language it means that this world of sense and matter exists in the consciousness of *Bhagavan*. Whatever exists must exist, as you know, in some consciousness. This universe with its countless objects, both material and spiritual, both sensuous and supersensuous, the world both of matter and men and of spiritual beings superior to men and endowed with finer and subtler organisations, exist eternally in the Eternal Consciousness of *Bhagavan*, as objects of His Consciousness. These are all objects of His knowledge and affections, and upon these He is eternally working to fashion them progressively to His ends.

But what is the true nature of these possessions or *aishvaryas* of the Lord? To us the things that we perceive with our senses appear as material. These objects are also subject to growth and decay. These changes in our sense-objects are constantly working corresponding changes in our mind. We are moved, for instance, by one kind of feeling at the sight of a fresh and blooming flower and by quite a different kind of



feeling at the sight of the same flower when we see this thing of exquisite beauty getting disgustingly decomposed before our very eyes. And so it is with all other sense-objects of ours. Their growth and decay affect our own consciousness. But the Eternal Consciousness in which this world exists cannot be subject to these changes. These objects as they exist in the Eternal Consciousness of *Bhagavan*, must, therefore, be themselves also above growth and decay. In other words, this outer world of our senses that is constantly passing through endless changes before our consciousness, must exist in an eternally realised state of fullness and perfection in the Eternal Consciousness of *Bhagavan*. The wealth or possessions of the Eternal Consciousness of *Bhagavan* that are the objects of His knowledge and activity and enjoyment must be eternally perfect entities. The *aishvaryas* of *Bhagavan* cannot be material but must necessarily be spiritual objects. That which we see passing through progressive course of evolution here, in this world-process, must exist eternally-realised in its fullness and perfection in *Bhagavan*.

#### THE CONCEPT BHAGAVAN

The first question that arises in our mind as

we stand before this world-process is—whence do these things come? How or by what are these things supported? Towards what or where do these move? What is their ultimate goal or destiny? And the first answer of Hindu thought to this three-fold query was—Brahman. But this does not render a final account of the world-process. The theory of Brahman is not really built upon an exhaustive process; it is this cosmic order or process. This analysis reveals the fact that this cosmic process is what we now call an evolutionary process. It is a process of growth or transformation from homogeneity through differentiation towards integration. It is like the process of the growth of a tree, for instance, from its seed. From a tiny and uniform banyan seed we see the growth of what we call the prince of our forests, spreading over immense space, having countless foliage. And we ask, how this could be? Where were these outspreading branches? Where were these countless leaves and twigs before? These could not come out of nowhere. The inevitable conclusion is that these branches and these foliage must have always been there in the seed, unevolved but secretly striving to burst forth. In other words, the plan and model, or the idea of the full-grown banyan must have existed from eternity to eternity in its

seed. The seed, in its final analysis, is reduced thus to an eternally-realised idea of the tree. The tree must have existed eternally as an idea, the first outer expression of which is the seed.

Even so this infinite world-process must have existed, both collectively and severally, as Idea in the Consciousness of the Eternal from eternity to eternity. What we call this world of matter is really a world of ideas. Evolution implies the evolution of an idea, like, for instance, the revelation of some form of beauty, that flashes upon the mind of the painter, upon his canvas. Evolution implies the existence of a perfected idea or an eternally-realised type that seeks progressive expression in time and space. What you call eternally-realised in your modern philosophical parlance, was called long before your Darwin and Spencer and Hegel by our teachers *nitya-siddha-svarup*. All things exist in their *nitya-siddha-svarup* in the Consciousness of *Bhagavan*. These archetypes or prototypes, called *nama* and *rupa* or name and form in Sanskrit, constitute the wealth and possessions, the *aishwarya* of *Bhagavan*. This is the first thing that you must grasp in seeking to enter into the true meaning and significance of our concept *Bhagavan*.

“VIRILITY”

And the next thing that you must try and

understand is the truth of the term *Veerya*. I have translated it in English as Virility. Virility means that quality in the constitution of man which enables him to seize and hold and work upon and enjoy the objects of his senses to their fullest measure. This follows from our conception of manhood which is the synonym for virility. And your first difficulty here in attributing the quality of *Veerya* or virility to the Ultimate Reality or God will be your inborn conviction that God is Spirit, which means that He has no body and necessarily, therefore, He can have no sense organs either ; and without these virility or *Veerya* may have only a figurative meaning when applied to the Divinity. Our Vaishnavic teachers, however, attribute both body and the sense organs to the Deity. But the body of the Lord, they say, is not like our bodies, something material or physical or sensuous. His is a spiritual body. Our bodies are made of flesh and blood and bones and nerves and various physical organs, but the body of the Lord is not so made. It is made of the three spiritual substances or qualities or properties, namely, pure existence or *Sat*, pure consciousness or *Chit*, and pure joy or bliss, or *Anandam*. The body of *Bhagavan* is constituted of these three spiritual qualities, *Sat-Chit-Anandam*. *Bhagavan* is, therefore, called

*Sachchidananda Purusha* in our literature. He has no material body. His is a pure spiritual body. He has no physical sense organs like our organs. His organs are all spiritual organs. And it is the strength of these spiritual organs which is called *Veerya*.

#### SENSE ORGANS ANALYSED

And an analysis of our own sense organs will help you to seize the meaning of what I have here called the spiritual organs of the Lord. In the first place, just consider the question—Does the Lord know everything? And next, is His knowledge direct or only inferential? Does He know directly all that I see with my eyes and hear with my ears and touch with my hands or taste with my palate etc, etc.? If He does, then He must have in His Own Being some instruments or organs of seeing and hearing, etc. Our ancient Upanishads realising the logic of this position, declared that though Brahman is without any sense organs like ours, He has in him the Power or Property of these organs. "*Sarcendriyagunabhasam sarcendriyavarjitam*"—without any sense organs (Brahman) yet having the property of all the senses. This is what the Upanishads say. And the property

or power of the sense of sight is seeing, of the sense of hearing is audition, and so on and so forth. And the Upanishads, which are always careful to leave no room for the suspicion of any manner of materiality or even sentiency in the Supreme, have been forced by the logic of thought to posit the power or property of all the senses in Brahman. Our Vaishnavic poet-philosophers pursuing the same logic still further posited spiritual organs in *Bhagavan*. In the vision of *Bhagavan* exist all forms. In the audition of *Bhagavan* exist all sounds. In His touch exist all things that are felt by us with our tactile nerves. And so on and so forth.

#### SPIRITUAL SENSE ORGANS

In positing these organs in *Bhagavan* our Vaishnava poet-philosophers, however, did not fancy the existence of gross material sense organs in the Lord. When we go to analyse our sense organs, we discover that these also like all other objects in creation progressively evolve themselves, grow from less to more. There are no organs in the protoplasmic cell from which gradually the human body is shaped. In the phœtus these are undeveloped. They are gradually developed with our age and growth. And

the logic of this evolutionary process is the same as what we are forced to recognise in the general processes of cosmic evolution. Here also we cannot explain the growth of these sense organs except on the hypothesis that at the back of this process stand eternally realised perfected organs of sense, that are not material or physical but truly spiritual. These eternally-realised organs are really ideas or archetypes of our sense organs. And like all archetypes these must exist in the Being of the Absolute. This is how our Vaishnavic poet-philosophers established the existence of spiritual sense organs in *Bhagavan*. And it is the strength of these spiritual sense organs of the Lord, by which He holds and shapes and enjoys all sense objects in His creation, which is understood by *Veerya* in our Vaishnavic thought. These two *bhagas*—*Aishvarya* and *Veerya*—constitute the very plinth and foundation of the Vaishnavic philosophy of Shree Krishna as *Bhagavan* or the Eternal, Infinite and Perfect Person.

I must, however, consider this matter in fuller detail in connection with the other *bhagas* in my next letter.

## LETTER IX

BHAGAVAN SHREE KRISHNA

I am really thankful to hear that you are finding the Hindu doctrine of the Divine Personality increasingly thought-provoking, as you put it. Truth to say, my child, I too could never honestly realise what the Personality of God really meant until I commenced to grope my way into the mysteries of our Vaishnavic theology, and particularly until I was led to Shree Krishna. Like most of your Liberal Christians, I too, no doubt, dared not openly reject this doctrine and in a general way did avow my belief in the Personality of God. But that was not a reasoned conviction. It was practically built upon what may be called faith of a kind. Faith, in its lowest phase, is only another name for uncritical acceptance of tradition. And my faith in the Divine Personality was at one time of this class. I found it difficult to seize in my inner consciousness how the Universal could be a Person. Personality, as we know it in our own self, is the product of our differences with other persons. We realise this Personality in our own self in proportion as the objects of our



knowledge, emotions and will stand before us as our own counter-parts.

In knowing this world of matter, we do not so clearly realise our personality as we do in knowing brother men. And even on the human plane, we do not so clearly realise our own personality in knowing babies and infants, as we do by making grown-up humans the object of our thoughts and emotions. And even here there is a clear distinction in our consciousness of our own personality as between what we realise by knowing and serving lower specimens of humanity and what we realise by our intercourse with the higher specimens of our common manhood. The more developed the object of our knowledge, the clearer and stronger comes out our consciousness of ourselves as distinguished from it, and with this consciousness grows clearer and stronger our realisation of our personality. If you can imagine yourself as cut off from all human associations, and living and growing from the moment of your birth only in the midst of what are called nature environments, you will see how little you will be able to discover your humanity or human personality amidst those surroundings. Our personality, or the consciousness that we are persons, grows through our contacts and conflicts with other

humans similar to ourselves in the stage of their evolution or development. It is only when we see our own reflection, so to say, in the objects of our knowledge and affections and our will, that we are really able to become conscious of our own personalities.

If, therefore, this doctrine or dogma of the Divine Personality be true, that is, if it be based upon actual experience, then God too must realise His Personality by standing as the subject of something which must be of His Own Nature, a reproduction, so to say, of Himself, a reflection or image of Himself. The object of the eternal knowledge of the Supreme Being in and through which He realises His own Consciousness as Knower and Director and Fashioner of His objects to His own Will and as Enjoyer, must, therefore, be of His own kind and class, must be similar in every way to Himself, must be self-conscious Personalities or Personality like Himself. This is the inevitable logic of the doctrine or dogma of what you call the Divine Personality.

#### ABSOLUTE MONISM

Our ancients fully understood and boldly accepted this logic. It is, therefore, that the

Hindu school of absolute Monism, or what is popularly known now as the Samkara Vedanta school, which does not accept any real duality or differentiation in Brahman, does not accept the Personality of Brahman. To this school, Brahman or the Ultimate Reality is Impersonal. All differences and dualities of our experience are not true or real but are only appearances. These are illusions caused by that mysterious power which brings that about which can never logically come to be. This mysterious power is named by them *Maya*. And the orthodox definition of this *Maya* is—"Aghatana-ghatana-pateeyasee." *Aghatana* means that which cannot happen ; *Ghatana* means that which happens ; *Pateeyasee* means possessing superior skill. The entire sentence means that which possesses the supreme skill of bringing that about which cannot come about. But our Vaishnava Vedantists proclaim the Personality of the Ultimate Reality or what the Upanishads call Brahman, because they hold that this Brahman is not an undifferentiated Unity but a Self-Differentiated Unity. There is nothing outside Brahman, Brahman is both the efficient and the material cause of this universe. All this is absolutely true. But in the Being of Brahman there is both duality and endless multiplicity, and it is in and through this duality and these

endless multiplicities that Brahman realises Himself as Knower, Worker and Enjoyer, or what is described in Sanskrit as *Sat*, *Chit*, and *Anandam*. Consciousness demands what is called the subject-and-object relation by the philosopher. There can be no consciousness or *jnanam* or knowledge or thought, unless there is a subject or knower or thinker on the one side, and an object of knowledge or thought, on the other. When, therefore, you declare that Brahman is *Jnanam* or Self-Conscious, you must find an Object in and through which Brahman realises this consciousness or *Jnanam*. This is the logic of the Vaishnavic position. And even Samkara himself, the most uncompromising of the monists, had to admit the force of this logic.

Samkara's position is that the universe has come from Brahman, is sustained by Brahman, and is moving towards Brahman and finally enters into Brahman. This Brahman is *Satyam*, or Self-Existent, *Jnanam* or Self-Conscious and *Anantam* or Infinite. "In all the Vedantas, words by their import, establish this truth." This is the conclusion to which Samkara arrives in his interpretation of the Brahma-Sutras.

#### NAME AND FORM

At this the question arises—"What is that

which before creation was the object of the consciousness of Brahman ? “You say that Brahman is conscious, is a knower or thinker. But there cannot be any knowing or thinking without an object. Now, we may take it, that this universe is the object of the consciousness of Brahman. But the scriptures declare that there was a time when the True or Brahman, the *Sat*, alone was ; nothing else was moving in this moving world. What was the object of the consciousness of Brahman then ? This is the problem here.

And forced by the logic of his position to face this problem, Samkara was driven to say—“That which was the object of the *Jnanam* or consciousness or knowledge or thought of Brahman before this universe came into being, was ‘Name and Form, that which are beyond human speech, Name and Form as yet un-evolved, though about to be evolved, Name and Form that are neither identical with nor yet different from Brahman.’

Even so uncompromising a monist as Samkara was thus forced by the irresistible logic of experience or thought to posit those Name and Form, that were neither identical with nor different from Brahman, in the Being of Brahman, the one Truth or Reality—the One-

without-a-Second. This is exactly the Vaishnavic position also. The difference between the synthesis of Samkara and that of the Vaishnavas is only a matter of emphasis.

#### DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SAMKARA AND VAISHNAVA VEDANTA

The real position of both is this, namely, that Brahman or the Absolute stands to Himself as His own object both of thought and love or enjoyment, by an act of eternal self-differentiation. This process of self-differentiation of the Absolute has been expressed in modern thought by the familiar Hegelian dictum—the Self separates Itself from Itself to return to Itself to be Itself. This is the process of all knowing, as well as of all love or enjoyment as of all volition or activity. The first step or stage in this process is the stage of homogeneity or undifferentiated unity. In this stage there is no consciousness. This consciousness comes as soon as this homogeneity commences to break up with the appearance of differentiation. But consciousness is not completed or perfected until this differentiation is followed by and ends in integration. The course of thought or knowledge or consciousness is this:—It starts from homogeneity or what is called unity, wherein there is neither subject nor object;

from this unity or homogeniety this process goes on to differentiation or duality, wherein the subject is separated or differentiated from the object ; but this is only the birth of consciousness, not its completion or perfection or fulfilment. This perfection or completion or fulfilment of consciousness is reached when the subject and the object are once more united now not on the plane of homogeniety or unconsciousness but on the plane of consciousness. The unity here is not undifferentiated unity but self-differentiated unity. It is not unconscious unity but a unity in which the subject is conscious of itself in and through its consciousness of its own object which is neither the same as itself nor yet different from itself. Here, in this self-conscious unity, the process of thought or consciousness is completed.

And the difference between the Samkara Vedanta and the Vaishnava Vedanta schools of Hindu thought is really a difference in the emphasis which these two schools lay on the different steps or stages of this process of thought or consciousness. Both admit the truth of this process. But while the Samkara Vedanta school thinks that the reality in this process is the last step or stage, wherein the subject loses itself in its object, and returns

to itself to be itself as the Hegelians would say, the Vaishnava Vedantists hold that all the three stages of this process are equally real, and equally necessary for the realisation of consciousness or thought. Differentiation is as real and eternal as integration, duality is as much a part of the Being of the Absolute as either Unity or Totality. The emphasis of Samkara Vedantic thought is on the last step or stage of this process, that of the Vaishnava Vedantic thought on all the steps or stages. To the Samkara Vedantist, the stage of differentiation is really unreal, it is *mayic*, transitory ; it is only an illusion. To the Vaishnava Vedantist this differentiation is as real as the final unification wherein the process of thought and enjoyment is completed. They say that which completes thought also kills it. Therefore, this unity or totality, as soon as it is completed, returns back to unity or homogeneity or unconsciousness. But the Eternally Self-Conscious Brahman cannot be Unconsciousness. Therefore, the completion of thought in the unification of subject and object, is broken up immediately it is completed by fresh differentiation, which is followed again by integration or unification. And thus this endless procession of self-differentiation proceeds from eternity to eternity.



## PURUSHA AND PRAKRITI

I have tried to indicate briefly the position of the two dominant schools of Hindu thought, because a general understanding of them is helpful to our study of the philosophy of Shree Krishna. 'Name and Form' which, as Samkara says, are the eternal objects of the Consciousness of Brahman or the Absolute, correspond to what is called the Logos or the Word in Christian theology. Logos is both word and thought, or idea and its expression. 'Name' in our thought represents the idea and Form or *Rupa* represents its expression. Our 'Name and Form'—*Nama-Rupa*—are the marks and notes by which we know one object from another. These are the marks of differentiation in our thought. These are also the contents of all our knowledge or thought. These 'Name and Form' represent, thus, what we call the objective world. The original type or archetype of this objective universe is therefore called here by Samkara 'Name and Form' or *Nama* and *Rupa*. But these expressions 'Name and Form' have a subjective or abstract meaning. Our Vaishnavic thought therefore called these by a more concrete name. What Samkara here calls 'Name and Form' our Vaishnava poet-seers

called *Prakriti*. This *Prakriti* is the eternal object of the Consciousness of the Absolute or Brahman. But this Self-Conscious Absolute is no longer called Brahman but the *Purusha* or the Supreme Person. The Ultimate Reality is the Totality ( to use a Kantian word ) composed of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. *Purusha* is what may be called the Subjective Universal or the Universal Subject ; while *Prakriti* is the Objective Universal or the Universal Object. *Purusha* is the Eternal and Infinite Knower and Thinker, *Prakriti* is the Infinite and Eternal Object of the knowledge and thought of *Purusha*. *Purusha* is the Eternal and Infinite Worker, *Prakriti* is the Infinite and Eternal Object upon which the Eternal and Infinite Will of the *Purusha* eternally operates for its own self-realisation and self-fulfilment. *Purusha* is the Eternal and Infinite Enjoyer or Lover and *Prakriti* is the Eternal and Infinite Object of His Love and Joy, called *Anandam* in Sanskrit. The Eternal and the Infinite, the Absolute, as your philosophers would call it, is completed in and through this duality. And this full and complete Absolute is called *Bhagavan* in our Vaishnavic thought.

There are, thus, you will see, two ultimate categories of our thought, one is *Purusha* and the other is *Prakriti*. *Purusha* is one, but

*Prakriti* has myriad forms. The entire creation is collectively the body of *Prakriti*. Every individual thing in this creation is also a part, a limb or organ of *Prakriti*. *Prakriti* is embodied in matter, and equally also in what we call life. We ourselves with the rest of the universe are parts and limbs and organs of *Prakriti*. Individually every human is a *Prakriti*. Collectively, what you call Humanity is also *Prakriti*. And because this *Prakriti* is eternally Self-Conscious, even as *Purusha* Himself is, this Humanity is not with us an abstraction but what Mazzini called a Being. This is the comprehensive connotation of our term *Prakriti*.

*Prakriti* is that through which the *Purusha* realises His own Consciousness, His Emotions and His Will or Volition. And for the fullest realisation of His own Self-Consciousness it is necessary that the object of His consciousness must be itself self-conscious. Our consciousness and self-realisation becomes full and complete in proportion as the object in and through which we realise ourselves is equal to us both in its nature and in the stage of its evolution or development. Our objects always determine the measure of our own self-realisation. In knowing matter we realise only the material aspect of ourselves. In making the so-called lower animals

objects of our thought and knowledge or of our affections, we realise only that much of ourselves which we have in common with the animal kingdom. In knowing men we realise our common humanity. But here on this human plane there are endless variations of the quality of our self-realisation determined by the stage of evolution or development of the human objects of our thought, knowledge, emotions and activities. In knowing little babies, we realise only the lowest degrees of our humanity. In knowing developed humans, our consciousness of ourselves as humans grows to greater fullness. When the objects of our thought and affections are primitive men only, we realise through them the lower levels of our humanity. We rise to a higher and fuller realisation of ourselves as humans in proportion as our social life develops, and what is called civilisation (what Mathew Arnold described as the "humanisation of man in society") advances.

Pursuing the logic of this universal experience our Vaishnava poet-philosophers conceived *Prakriti* also as a person. As *Purusha* realises His own Personality in and through His relations with *Prakriti*, which is the eternal object of His thought or knowledge and his emotions and will, even so *Prakriti* also realises her

(*Prakriti*, as I told you, is conceived to be of the feminine gender ) personality in and through *Purusha* who is the eternal object of her thought and knowledge as well as her emotions and will or service. In this mutual relationship between the *Purusha* and the *Prakriti* is the Personality of the Absolute or Brahman or God fully established in our thought. Those who do not accept this Vaishnavic analysis of Being or Consciousness do not also accept the Personality of God ; to them God is impersonal or, as they say now, super-personal. Our Vaishnavic thought calls its Personal God *Bhagavan*.

Now, as I have just said the *Prakriti* which is the eternal object of the knowledge and love and will of the Supreme Lord, holds within its own being the endless multiplicities of matter and men which constitute this universe. Men are also parts of this *Prakriti* ; but they are parts which contain within them the potency of the whole. The whole is involved in these parts. The relation is organic. Just as we read in the Upanishads that in this creative process the One Truth without a Second has multiplied Himself and has become many, even so it is conceived of the *Prakriti* also that on the human plane she has become many, has multiplied herself to be many ; and, therefore, each human individual

represents in himself or herself the fullness of the being of *Prakriti*. This is the plinth and foundation of human culture and religion, which have always been with us practically one and the same thing. The objective of all human religion is to bring out the God that is in individual members of the human family. God can be revealed only in and through the fullness of the life of the *Prakriti*. And, therefore, in proportion as we reach the fulness of the life of the *Prakriti*, who is latent in us, we reach out to the fullness of the life of God in us. To use your familiar Christian terminology, in proportion as we are able to realise and reproduce the fullness of the life and spirit of the Christ in us, in that proportion we are able to rise to and reveal the life of God in us. What our Vaishnavas call *Prakriti* is practically the same as that which is called the Christ in Christian thought and consciousness. Your Christ is the *Logos*, the Word that was with God, that is God, the very God of God, as your Fourth Gospel puts it. Our *Prakriti* is also what Samkara calls "Name and Form", which is the same as your *Logos*. Your Word or *Logos* is in all things, whatever is has been made by the Word. The Word is both the efficient and the material cause of the universe. So is our *Prakriti*. But this *Prakriti* exists

from eternity to eternity in the being of the Absolute with the multiple contents of her being. In this way our Vaishnavic thought posited not mere duality in the being of the Absolute but endless multiplicity also. This cosmic world exists in its ideal perfection, eternally realised, in the Absolute. This human society also exists there in the being of the Absolute in its highest perfection, eternally realised. So do individual humans, with all their complex and multiple relations with other humans, exist in their eternally-realised forms and perfection in the being of the Absolute. This eternally realised life of the world of matter and the world of men are the contents of the perfected and eternally realised life of *Prakriti*. You and I and all humans, with all their relations of love and service, and all the objects and vehicles of our thought and our love and our will, have eternally existed in the Absolute in their eternally realised state. It is from there that we all have come down or descended in this world process. It is there that we are destined to go back when this life is perfected through the disciplines and experiences of this life, and we reach perfect union with our original type and source. This is the necessary logic of what you call evolution. And pursuing

this logic, our Vaishnava devotees and seers conceived the Absolute as *Bhagavan*, who is the Lord not only of this outer world of phenomena but also of that other world of ideas or archetypes, of the original norm and form of all that appears on this creative plane. This sense-world of ours exist in *Bhagavan* as His *Aishvarya* or wealth and possessions. These very senses of ours, and by which we know and enjoy this world of matter and sense, exist in their eternally realised state as the spiritual senses, so to say, of *Bhagavan* and constitute what is called His *Veerya* or Virility.

Nor is this all. We all with all our multitudinous relations of love and service have existed, from eternity to eternity, in our eternally realised state of absolute fullness and perfection, in *Bhagavan*. Our social life has thus its archetype in the very being of *Bhagavan*. And it is this eternally realised type of our social life and realations as existing in the very being of *Bhagavan* from eternity to eternity, which is the origin and basis of *bhaga* number three, as enumerated in a previous letter, namely, *Yasha*, which means in English good repute. But I must explain the full meaning and significance of *Yasha* in my next letter.



## LETTER X

BHAGAVAN SHREE KRISHNA (*continued*)

You have been able to realise, I hope, the meaning and significance of the terms *Aishvarya* and *Veerya* roughly rendered into English by wealth and virility, which are counted as *bhagas* in our thought. After these comes *Yasha*. The meaning of *Yasha* is good repute or good opinion of fellow beings. *Yasha* implies the existence of a company of fellow beings or society. To secure good repute we must have people about us who are able to understand and correctly appreciate our thoughts and deeds. This is only possible when they belong more or less to the same stage of evolution or advancement which we ourselves occupy. And the first question that arises here, when we ascribe this *Yasha* or good repute to God, is, who can these beings be who compose, so to say, the society of the Lord, who are of the same class as Himself, who are more or less of the stage of His perfection, and who, therefore, are able to correctly understand and appreciate His thoughts and deeds? The term *Yasha* applied to the Lord implies that he has been surrounded by a company

of spiritual beings who have been His eternal companions and who have fully and eternally responded to His thoughts, His emotions and His will. Who are these ? And even before we consider this question, we must consider the previous question, how can this be ? How can there be such companions of the Absolute who is Unrelated and Unconditioned, who exists in Himself and is One-without-a-Second ?

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF YASHA

As I have already told you, there is no room for the concept *Bhagavan* in the school of absolute monism, associated with Samkara. This school does not believe in any duality or differentiation in the Lord or the Ultimate Reality. But the Vaishnavic school, as I tried to explain in my last letter, accept an eternal self-differentiation in the Absolute, by which the Absolute or Brahman stands differentiated eternally before Himself as the object of His own thought or consciousness, as well as of His love and His will. In this act of eternal self-differentiation, the Absolute as the Subject is called *Purusha*, and the same Absolute as its own Object both of thought and love as well as of its eternally operative will, that is eternally fashioning the universe to its

own ends,—is called *Prakriti*. It is in and through the mutual relations and response of the *Purusha* and the *Prakriti* that the Absolute realises itself as a Person. This is the philosophy of what you would call the Divine Personality in our Vaishnavic thought. I have already tried to explain all this in my last letter. This *Prakriti*, is, however, a composite being. *Prakriti* has or holds within itself (or herself, as our Vaishnavic philosophers would say) an endless multiplicity of beings similar in nature to herself, all self-conscious like herself, and all severally and collectively bound up with her on the one side, and with *Purusha*, on the other. But the relations of these countless myriads of self-conscious beings with the *Purusha* are not direct but are established and realised through the *Prakriti*. Because the *Prakriti*, like the *Purusha*, is eternally perfect and self-realised, stands beyond the time series ; and, therefore, is able to fully meet the demands of the eternally perfect and infinite *Purusha*. *Purusha* is full and complete in His relations with *Prakriti*. *Purusha* has really no need of these myriads of beings who compose, so to say, the being of *Prakriti* for His own self-realisation. His *Prakriti* is sufficient unto that end. These myriads of beings are, therefore, related to *Purusha* in and through

*Prakriti* with whom they are joined as limbs to a body or organs to an organism. The self-realisation and self-fulfilment of these myriads of beings comes through the *Prakriti* alone and they reach their highest realisation and perfection in the *Purusha* not directly but through the mediation of the *Prakriti*. Your Christian theologians will be able to enter into the meaning of this Vaishnavic dogma or theory by interpreting it in the terms of their own thought and speculations, and substituting here the Christ for our *Prakriti*. As in your popular Christian thought and theology salvation comes only through Christ, and man must seek and find or reach his God in and through the Christ, even so in our Vaishnavic thought and theology, all creation, which consists of beings in course of progressive realisation of their respective ends and perfection, must seek and reach their respective ends in God but through His *Prakriti*. And in the conception of this *Prakriti* as a composite being wherein is included an endless myriads of beings who participate fully in the nature and life of the *Prakriti*, who are in all respects like the *Prakriti* herself, our Vaishnavic poet-philosophers found the ground and substance of their conception of *Yasha* or good repute, as a *bhaga* of the Lord.

## SOCIETY OF THE LORD

The unity of the Absolute or the Lord is not an undifferentiated but an eternally self-differentiated unity. In this eternal act of the self-differentiation, the Absolute stands to Himself as His own Subject and His own Object. In His subjective aspect, the Absolute is *Purusha* ; in His objective aspect the Absolute is *Prakriti*. This *Prakriti* is both inanimate nature and a spiritual being. As a spiritual being this *Prakriti* is a composite entity, has and holds within itself the myriads of spiritual beings in creation, including the human race. These spiritual beings partake of the nature of the *Prakriti*, are self-conscious and capable of loving and responding to love, and working their own will upon others and capable of being worked upon similarly by other wills. These spiritual beings eternally self-realised or existing in all their perfection in the being of the *Prakriti* and through the *Prakriti* participating in the eternal sport of the *Purusha*, constitute what may be called the Society of the Lord or the *Purusha* and thus find the ground and substance of His *Yasha* or good repute. The *bhaga* called *Yasha* of *Bhagavan* implies this.

Judaism, as you know, is like all ethnic

systems, an essentially social religion. And therefore you find in the Old Testament the idea of a society of spiritual beings, called the Sons of God, or Angels, who are the eternal companions of the Almighty, who love Him with all their mind, all their soul and all their strength, who are constantly united in love and will with the Lord Almighty. These Sons of God, Ben-e-Elohim, constitute the society of the Lord, and what is called *Yasha* in our Vaishnavic thought and literature as a *bhaga* of *Bhagavan* or the Lord is really the good repute which the Lord Almighty of the Old Testament enjoyed among these Sons of God, or in the society of the Angels. You are familiar with the idea of the Angels singing glory to the Lord. These hymns of praise are what our Vaishnava poet-philosophers would accept as a proof of the *Yasha* or good repute of *Bhagavan*. The Sons of God are eternal and immortal beings, who have been with the Lord Almighty from eternity to eternity carrying out His wishes in His creation, and responding to His love and will from eternity. If you still believe in these Angels, you will find little or no difficulty to enter into the spirit of what our Vaishnavic philosophers have spoken of as *Yasha* or good repute of the Lord *Ishwara* or *Bhagavan*. But who believes in Angels

to-day, in modern civilisation? Belief in Angels have been relegated by modern rationalism to the uncritical and unscientific fancies of primitive culture. It is useless to refer you to it as a help to the understanding of *Yasha* or good repute as an element in the very being of the Lord.

#### THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE GEETA

You may not have any belief in Angels ; but do you believe in your own soul or self as immortal ? If you do, and examine the rational basis of this belief, you will find it very easy, I venture to think, to understand the reality for which this concept *Yasha* stands as an element of the being the Absolute. And in our examination of this problem of the immortality of the human soul there is no better guide in our thought and life than Shree Krishna himself. The entire philosophy of this immortality is found in a nut-shell, as it were ; in the Bhagavad-Geeta or the Lay of the Lord, of which Shree Krishna is the Teacher. Let us, therefore, put off any further study of the concept *Yasha* for a while, and sit at the feet of Shree Krishna himself to read and understand with his benign help and under his guidance the fundamenal doctrine of the immortality of the soul. For the entire

philosophy of Shree Krishna, as I have been feebly essaying to explain in these epistles, is bound up with this philosophy. It is, however, a very large subject. And it is as complex as it is large. It is really the centre theme of the whole of the Bhagabad-Geeta. I had better start our study of it with a new epistle. What little I have told you in the present letter will, I hope, be helpful to you as something like an introduction to the study of our philosophy of the Soul and Immortality.



## LETTER XI

### IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

In the Bhagavad-Geeta Shree Krishna solves the question of the immortality of the human soul or consciousness by at once proclaiming what we call birth as something that is true only of the human body but not of the soul. Arjuna is troubled with certain prospect of death to friends and relations who are ranged in battle array against one another in the field of *Kurukshetra* ; and he lays down his arms, saying that it is better to earn one's living by begging from door to door than to secure the mastery of the earth and the heavens by killing one's friends and relations. An empire stained with the blood of brother man is not worth acquiring. Seeing him thus downcast by the thought of death and bereavement, Shree Krishna declares :—

“You talk like the wise and are yet overtaken by grief at the death of those who cannot die. Neither myself, nor you, nor these lords of people who are assembled here, were ever born ; nor shall we all ever cease to exist.”

This sums up the entire philosophy of the soul

and immortality in our thought. Our ancients realised it that if once you admit that souls are born, that is, are brought into being in time, then you must also admit that they are bound to pass out of this existence in time some day. Whatever is born dies, must certainly die. That is the evidence of universal experience. Things that have a beginning in time must have an end also within this time series. If the human soul be immortal, then it could ne never haven been born. Birth and death are two ends of the one and the same thing. Shree Krishna therefore boldly proclaimed that the soul cannot die because the soul is never born.

This is, indeed, the doctrine of the soul in our thought, and had been proclaimed long before the Bhagabad-Geeta was propounded, in our ancient Upanishads. In the Kathopanishad, which is entirely devoted to the elucidation of the soul, it is distinctly declared that this is unborn, everlastingly the same ancient and eternal, it is not destroyed with the destruction of the body. Shree Krishna develops this ancient doctrine in the Bhagavad-Geeta. Following this line of ancient thought, our Vaishnavic poet-philosophers have posited the whole of humanity both severally and collectively in the very being of *Bhagavan* which

is their word for what you would call the Divine Personality.

Personality implies, as I have already pointed out, differentiation. There can be no consciousness of personality or the sense that I am I, unless I stand in contact with and yet contradistinguished from, other personalities, who belong to my own class and kind. It is by seeing my own reflection so to say in other beings that I first became fully conscious of my own self or personality. This personality of mine develops in proportion as I find my thought not only reflected in but supplemented by the thoughts of other persons and my affections receive their fullest response from other humans. These responses are essential for the realisation of our personality or the fullest development of the sense that we are we, and stand differentiated from other beings, more or less like ourselves. There can thus be no consciousness of personality unless there are others like ourselves who are the objects of our thought and our love, and upon whom we are able to constantly apply our will to fashion them to our own liking or likeness and who react similarly upon us, by their thoughts, their affections and their wills. Personality requires thus (1) an object of our thought, through

which we are able to realise ourselves as thinker or subject and whose thoughts react upon our thoughts; (2) an object of our love which not only receives our affections but adequately responds to these and loves us in return, and which we are able to constantly bring into perfect union with ourselves by constantly seeking to lose ourselves in it; and (3) an object upon which we are able to apply our will to fashion it to our own ideals, and which is able to respond to this operation of our will by its own conscious efforts to rise up to the highest standards of our thought and thereby reacts upon us. These are the essential elements of personality as we know and realise it in ourselves.

The Divine Personality cannot therefore be an undifferentiated, but must necessarily be a self-differentiated Unity. This is the fundamental Vaishnavic position, as I have said. And in this Divine Personality individual human souls exist from eternity to eternity in their eternally realised form and state. I use the word form here deliberately, because though the human soul has no material form or body made of corruptible flesh and blood, yet it is and can never be formless. For, form is the very soul and essence of the concept differentiation and therefore of the concept personality as well.

Our Vaishnavas accept unreservedly the personality of God. Their God is not the Impersonal Brahman of the Samkara Vedanta School but the personal Iswara or the Lord. Therefore, Vaishnavic thought posits an eternal act of self-differentiation in the Absolute, by which the Absolute stands to Himself as His own object of thought and love and will. This object of the thought, love and will of the Absolute is, as I have said, in a previous letter, called *Prakriti*. This term *Prakriti* carries many meanings. On the one side, this outer cosmic world is called *Prakriti*. But this is only what may be called the setting in which the *Prakriti* is placed to reveal and realise Herself both to Herself and in relation to the *Purusha*. This cosmic world again is a composite world. It holds within itself both what we call the world of physical objects as well as what we know as the world of sentient and self-conscious beings both human and those that stand below and above this human plane. Here in this cosmic world, that exists in itself in its essence and idea, in the consciousness of the Absolute, is what we call *Prakriti*. But we too exist as eternal essences, as both eternal idea and form, from eternity to eternity, as parts or components or organs or limbs of this *Prakriti*. It is to this eternal idea and form

of ours, that from which the present course of our individual or personal evolution has proceeded, that Shree Krishna refers here as that which was never born and which, therefore, can never die. This, in a nutshell, is the whole doctrine of the immortality of the human soul or the doctrine or dogma of the persistence of the human consciousness or personality after death in our Vaishnavic thought.

#### POINTS OF ARGUMENT

The whole argument is this : If we are born in time, then it is inevitable that we must also cease to be in our present state or form in time, or, in other words, if it be true that we, as we know ourselves to be, as a self-conscious personality, did not exist before we appeared on the plane of the living at our present birth, then we must inevitably cease to exist in our present state as self-conscious persons at death. There could be no death for us, that is no break in the continuity of our consciousness that we are we, only if there never was any birth also of this consciousness. Shree Krishna says, we were never born and therefore we cannot die also. This is the first point in the Hindu doctrine of the immortality of the soul, as you would call it.

The next point is this : If we are never born,

or, in other words, if this personality of ours never came into being at any particular point of time or if it be true that we have existed as individuals from eternity then where and how did we exist before our present birth, as individual humans ? The answer to this question is, that we all have existed in the Being of Brahman, conceived as the *Purusha-and-Prakriti* or Bhagavan as the Bhagavata says, from eternity ; or, more correctly speaking, we have existed in and as *Prakriti* in the very Being of the Lord from eternity to eternity, and we have existed there as eternally realised personalities.

But the concept personality implies relations of thought, love and will ; which again implies the existence of other persons similar to ourselves, who stand related to us in and through our rational, our emotional, and our volitional life. In other words, the existence of our personalities as eternally realised in the Being of the Absolute, implies also the existence of other personalities eternally-realised in the Absolute, in and through our multitudinous relations of love and service in association with whom we have been eternally realising the fulness and perfection of our personalities. It means, in plain language, that there has existed from

eternity to eternity, a society of eternally realised and perfected personalities in the very Being of the Lord Iswara or Bhagavan.

This is the logic of the position which Shree Krishna took up in the Bhagavat-Geeta in regard to this problem of the human immortality or the persistence of our personalities beyond death. We have existed from eternity to eternity in the Being of the Absolute as parts and limbs and organs, so to say, of His *Prakriti* in and through which He eternally realises His Personality. "Neither I myself (as distinguished from others), nor you, nor these lords of men (as distinct individualities or personalities) were born in the past, nor shall we cease to be (as distinct individuals or persons) in the future." This is the gist of the Geeta doctrine of what you call immortality.

It implies that even the soul of man has notes or marks of individual or personal differentiations like the human bodies. There can be no individuality or personality without these notes or marks by means of which one soul is known as distinguished from others. These notes or marks of individuals constitute the essence of our concept individuality or personality. These notes and marks also constitute the essence of the concept form or body. Form



does not mean necessarily material form, nor does the the term body necessarily mean a material or sensuous body. We speak of forms of thought, which mean not material forms, but what may well be called thought forms, or notes and marks of thinking that distinguish one thought from another. Generally these forms of thought are revealed in words, but we can conceive also of speechless thought, whose forms must be beyond words. Form or body does not necessarily imply therefore a physical or sensuous body or form. And when we speak of individualities or personalities as eternally existing in the Absolute in their eternally realised and absolutely perfected forms or bodies, we do not attribute carnality or materiality to these forms or bodies.

#### SIDDHA DEHA

Indeed, what really are these things which we call material or carnal forms or bodies? At the final analysis do not these resolve themselves into ideas or archetypes? These forms or bodies are passing through the process of evolution of an idea. This idea is not a material but a spiritual substance. Even this gross form of flesh and blood in which our souls or personalities are clothed now, are really not

gross material things seen in the light of this law of evolution, but are really found at their final analysis to be spiritual ideas or archetypes, that are seeking to progressively reveal and realise themselves in this cosmic process. And in the Being of the *Prakriti* these bodies of ours exist from eternity to eternity, in their eternally-realised state and perfection. Our Vaishnavic thought has a special term for these eternally-realised bodies of ours in which we exist from eternity to eternity in the Lord. That term is *Siddha Deha*. *Siddha* means eternally realised,—*Deha* means body. These spiritual forms or bodies of ours are the eternal instruments and vehicles through which we stand related in thought, emotions and will to other spiritual beings who constitute the elements of the *Prakriti* on the one side and through the *Prakriti* to the *Isvara* or Bhagavan on the other.

And it is this society of spiritual personalities, eternally present in the Being of the Lord, who constitute the ground of *bhaga* number three, *Yasha* or good repute of Bhagavan. These spiritual personalities are what have been called Sons of God in your Old Testament. These are what have been conceived as Angels by Catholic Christianity. These are

what our Vaishnavic thought seized as the eternally realised human personalities in the Being of the Lord, or *Siddhas* or *Siddha Dehis*.

This society of eternally realised personalities living in their multitudinous relations of love and service with one another and in the perfect enjoyment and fulfilment of these loves and relations in God, is what Christ referred to as the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God. This is what our Vaishnavic poet-seers speak of *Shree Brindaban*.

Here in the society of the *Siddhas* or what you would call the Angels, who are really no other in our Vaishnavic thought than the eternally perfected archetypes or prototypes or ideas that stand behind the evolution of our own personalities—the hypothesis which justifies the injunction of Christ, Be ye as perfect as your Father in Heaven is, and which is the logic of the declaration of your Bible that God made man in His own image—that Bhagavan realises His *Yasha*. And it is here in this conception of Bhagavan as eternally realising Himself in a society of eternally perfect personalities that we have the highest idea or ideal of the social philosophy of the Hindus. It is here also, in our conception of the Divine Personality as

Bhagavan, that we have our real philosophy of this cosmic world. But of this I must speak in another letter.

## LETTER XII

### SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE AND BEAUTY

I have tried to explain so far three out of the six *bhagas* which fill up our concept Bhagavan. The other three, as you may possibly remember are (1) *Shree* or that which draws others by its loveliness, (2) *Jnanam* or knowledge or wisdom, (3) *Vairagya* or disattachment. *Shree* in ordinary parlance is that quality of our face and form as well as of our general deportment which by its loveliness powerfully attracts others to us. It consists first of exquisite beauty or loveliness of form or body. Second, this *Shree* consists of the beauty or loveliness of the movements of the limbs, and in its cultivated state it develops into the most artistic modes of walking or standing or sitting or lying down and of speaking (revealing the attractiveness of the voice which is exquisitely musical) or looking, revealing the irresistible power of the eyes to fascinate others. All these are what may be described as the constituent elements of this *bhaga* number four—*Shree*. It implies a perfect body and the highest perfection of all limbs and organs of this body. Bhagavan, in our

Vaishnavic thought is, therefore, conceived not as absolutely without body or form. Neither is Bhagavan burdened with bodies like our own, that are formed of gross material and are subject to growth and decay. But the body of Bhagavan is made up of spiritual substances. These spiritual substances are three, namely, pure existence or *Sat*, and pure thought or *Chit*, and pure joy or *Anandam*. Our bodies are made of flesh and blood and nerves and bones and other material substances. The body of Bhagavan is not made of these corrupt elements, that are subject to disease and decay and death, but of eternally realised *Sat*, *Chit* and *Anandam*. These are also the material out of which our own eternally realised bodies or forms in which we exist from eternity to eternity in the Being of the Lord Bhagavan are made. And, indeed, the logic of our physical forms and lives is this Eternal Form or Body of the Lord Bhagavan.

All our perceptions of the beauties of the form suggest the existence of a Form of Beauty absolutely full and perfect. The evolution of human beauty posits this absolutely perfect beauty at its origin, which it is the aim of this evolution to reach and reveal. So it is with all the other ideals of loveliness which is the eternal quest of Art. And the ultimate generalisation

and final synthesis of our experiences of beauty and loveliness is this Perfected Beauty or the Form of Beauty of Bhagavan, who is the abode of all beauty and loveliness or what is called *Shree* in Sanskrit and who, therefore, perpetually draws all self-conscious beings to Him. In His Beauty is the fulfilment and satisfaction of our eyes. In His voice is the fulfilment and satisfaction of our ears. And so on and so forth. Bhagavan is the fulfilment and satisfaction of all our senses. These senses are perpetually essaying to rise through perception of material objects to the realisation of that joy which cannot come from matter. In fact, there is no joy or enjoyment that can be called absolutely material or sensuous. All joy, like all thought, comes through self-realisation. In our enjoyment of things as in our knowledge of them the self ( to quote the familiar Hegelian dictum ) separates itself from itself to return to itself to be itself. Unless and until the self finds itself back in the object of its enjoyment, it finds really no joy in it. When we enjoy gross material objects, for instance sweets or scents etc., we realise through these our gross sense life. But these enjoyments do not reveal our self fully. It is only when other humans become the objects of our enjoyment, when we lose ourselves in the

contemplation of the beauty of the human form or the sweetness of the human voice, or the softness or coolness of the human touch or the fragrance of the human body, or the grace of human movement, when speech of man or woman becomes pure music, and their walking becomes the most perfect dancing, revealing through sound and movement the highest ideals of music or dancing, it is only then that we realise our own self or soul in and through these so-called sense enjoyments of ours. And then these enjoyments really cease to be sensuous but are lifted to the plane of the spiritual. Because the soul and essence of these enjoyments is not to be found in what we seize with our gross senses, but in that which perpetually eludes the grasp of these senses and draws us away from the realm of the seen and the sensuous to that of the unseen and the spiritual. Indeed, the universal experience of all sense-enjoyment is that these enjoyments pall upon our soul the moment they reach the limits of their sense perceptions, and cease to afford us any joy, unless and until we are able to feel the attraction of the unseen and the spiritual in them. Our art consciousness is perpetually lifting us through our very sense experiences and sense enjoyments to the plane



of the super sensuous and the spiritual. Our perception of human beauty and human loveliness therefore continually lead us to the cognition, however dim and feeble it may be, of a Form of Perfect Beauty and Loveliness which the eye of man cannot see, but which the soul of man, which illumines his eye and all his outer senses, perpetually hankers after. And this Form of Perfect Beauty and Loveliness constitutes what is called *bhaga* number four, or *Shree* in our ancient traditions.

*Bhaga* number five is *Jnanam* and number six is *Vairaggyam*. *Jnanam* means, as you already know, knowledge. Here the term *Jnanam* is qualified by the adjective *samagra* or entire, from beginning to end. All knowledge is in Bhagavan. He is the repository of absolute knowledge and wisdom. And He has also all *Vairagya* or disattachment in Him. Both this knowledge and this *Vairagya* are essential requisites of the Perfected Being of the Lord. He holds in His Knowledge all the objects of the universe both severally and collectively, and He enjoys all these objects as well. These are the objects of both His knowledge and His enjoyment. But both perfect knowledge and perfect enjoyment demand the aloofness of the knower and enjoyer from the object of his

knowledge and enjoyment which is implied by the term *Vairagya*. These, namely, *Aishvarya*, *Veerya*, *Yasha*, *Shree*, *Jnana* and *Vairagya*, are called the six *bhagas* in Sanskrit. Bhagavan is He who possesses these in their entirety.

## LETTER XIII

### SYNTHESIS OF OUR EXPERIENCES

BHAGAVAN is, as I have tried to explain in my previous letters, the ultimate synthesis of our experiences. These experiences fall under three heads : (1) our experiences of matter or the outer cosmic world ; (2) our experiences of our own inner life ; (3) our experiences of other humans, both as individuals and as members of society. The generalisations of these experiences constitute what we call science. All our sciences, as you will find upon a little reflection, are built upon the hypothesis of what I would call our consciousness of a dual order, one consisting of an objective world of facts or actualities and the other, a subjective world of ideas or idealities. The physical sciences, for instance, which are built upon the generalisations of our experiences of outer physical phenomena, are really based upon our perceptions of these phenomena on the one side and our intuitions of a mental order or system of ideas corresponding to this outer physical order on the other. It is these inner intuitions which enable us to rationally understand,

interpret and systematise our experiences of this outer cosmic or physical order, and thereby to construct the physical group of the sciences. Similarly, our experiences of our inner life also reveal a dual order, namely, an order of actualities that are realised by us in our thoughts and emotions and volitions on the one side and an order of idealities which these relations are constantly aspiring to attain. We know ourselves really not by what we actually think or feel or will from moment to moment but by that which standing behind these passing transformations progressively reveal their ideal-end. The Universal is the logic of our inner rational, emotional and volitional life. All our thoughts and emotions and volitions seize their particular objects not by themselves but in and through the universal relations in which they stand with other thoughts, other emotions and other volitions. It is upon these intuitions of the Universal as revealed in our inner life that we are able to build up the psychological group of the sciences as well as all our philosophies. Similarly, our experiences of the human society which constitute the foundation of ethics of all our social relations and endeavours, posit a universal and eternally realised social or moral order at the back of ours wherein we progressively

cognise the ideal orders, namely, the ideal physical, the ideal mental and the ideal social order in the being of the ABSOLUTE and have given the name of BHAGAVAN to the ABSOLUTE thus realised.

This material or natural order before us, the blue expanse of the heavens above, this sun, this moon, these planets, these starry hosts, these winds and clouds, the phenomena of the rainbow and the twilights, lightening and rain and every other manifestation on the celestial place—all these are perpetually quickening our thoughts and inspiring our emotions with the suggestion of a perfection and beauty which they are striving to reveal but can never reach. As we gaze upon the rising sun, we are drawn by the intuitions of a promise of grandeur which the sun never fully realises. Similarly, as we gaze upon the full moon flooding the heavens and the earth with liquid silver, we dream of scenes of beauty and loveliness which the moon can never reveal. And so on and so forth in all our experiences of this outer cosmic life and phenomena, we perpetually sense a state of eternally realised perfection in which this outer cosmic world must somewhere exist. We see this outer world is passing through a course of

evolution. In other words, we see growth and development here. But growth and development can have no meaning unless they move towards some definite but unrealised though progressively realising state of perfection. This perfected state of cosmic objects and phenomena is the Regulative Idea in cosmic evolution. Cosmic evolution, therefore, necessarily establishes a perfected or eternally realised form and condition of this cosmic world. Where is it to be found? In Bhagavan, this is the answer of our Vaishnavic thought.

Whatever exists must exist in some thought or consciousness. There can be no existence except in consciousness or thought. This immeasurable material universe must exist in a Consciousness, which is endless and eternal. This cosmic world, so far as we are able to think it out, could really have no beginning in time. The changes which we observe in this world do no doubt occur in time. Particular transformations in this cosmic world, which we see going on before our eyes, really constitute as so many links in a chain of which we neither know the beginning nor can see the end. The inevitable logic of cosmic evolution is that that which is progressively

revealing itself in time and space must have an existence in its perfected and eternally realised condition beyond time and space or in some Consciousness which holds within itself all time and all space. The One-and-Undivided Consciousness--the *Adraya-Jnanam*—in which this cosmic order exists eternally realised in its fullness and perfection is Bhagavan.

Similarly, our individual inner experiences also posit as their inevitable logic an Eternal Consciousness in which we live and move and have our being. But these inner experiences of ours combine our sense perceptions on the one hand and our inner intuitions on the other. Our thoughts, emotions and activities are related on the one side to this outer world of sense and matter and on the other to the inner world of thoughts and ideas. The Eternal Consciousness in which we move, live and have our being must, therefore, combine within itself both this outer cosmic world and the world of thought, emotions and will of men. These human beings also like the outer cosmic world exist in their eternally realised form and perfection in this Eternal Consciousness called Bhagavan. You and I and every other human who are growing from weakness to strength,

form ignorance to knowledge, from selfishness to love, we too must have a perfected and eternally realised life behind this present life of ours, which is passing through this evolutionary process. That is the irresistible conclusion to which our inner life leads. Like this cosmic order our inner mental, emotional and volitional life also has its meaning and fulfilment in Bhagavan.

Similarly, again, this social order of ours with its multitudinous relations of love and service and the action and counter-action of different personalities upon one another in and through which our moral and spiritual consciousness evolves, suggests as its inevitable logic a perfect Social Order wherein all the relations of life stand eternally realised. This eternally realised social or moral order, this world of emotional and volitional idealities which hold the master key to the profound mysteries of our spiritual life, exists in Bhagavan as elements of His Own Being. This perfect social order must be set in a perfected cosmic order or nature-environments. All these, therefore, namely a perfected social order, perfected human individuals and a perfect cosmic order exist in the very Being of the Lord.

This eternally realised triple order and relations have been conceived as *Shree Brindaban* by our



poet philosophers. This *Brindaban* is the key-note of the doctrine of Bhagavan and the philosophy of Shree Krishna. To understand what our concept Bhagavan really stands for, you must try and seize the conception of *Brindaban*. What the Kingdom of Heaven was to Jesus Christ, what New Jerusalem was to Sweedenburg, what is called Heaven in every religion, that is *Shree Brindaban* to Indian Vaishnavic thought and realisation. But I must speak of this in my next letter.

## LETTER XIV

### KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Have you ever tried to think out and reproduce in your own mind what really is the Kingdom of Heaven of which you have heard ever since you were a little child repeating the Lord's Prayer morning and evening seated upon your mother's knees ?

"Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

What is this Heaven ? What is this thing which you have always referred to as "Thy Kingdom" ? I wonder if this question has ever troubled you. I wonder really if it ever troubles those countless millions of Christians who repeat it every day of their life. If, however, you discover what this Kingdom of Heaven really and truly stands for, you will be forced to the conclusion that it is nothing, indeed it can possibly be nothing, more or less than that world of ideas or idealities that stands at the back of this world of our sense and thought and furnishes an intelligent, that is, a rational explanation of it.

## UNIVERSAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Our examination of existence leads us to the first conclusion, as I have already pointed out in these letters, that whatever exists must exist in some consciousness which knows that it exists. This universe must, therefore, exist in Universal Consciousness. This is the first conclusion of our examination of our existence.

This universe, again, as we know it in our experiences, is passing through a course of evolution. In other words, this universe, with all its multitudinous objects, is perpetually growing from less to more. The objects of this universe are passing through ceaseless transformations ; and these transformations are reaching out to some idea or ideal which is being perpetually approached by the various objects of this creation but which these objects never seem to reach. Evolution therefore implies the presence of some ideal or perfected type which it seeks to reveal and realise. This universe, which is passing through the course of evolution almost before our very eyes, must have therefore both collectively and severally a perfected form or state of its own which it is seeking to reach progressively in and through this visible process of evolution and transformation. And this perfected form or type

of the universal cosmic order must exist like everything else in some consciousness. This order being eternal and infinite, the Consciousness that holds it must also be Eternal and Infinite. This is the necessary logic of our experience of this world before us.

And, my child, you will see at once if you have followed me intelligently so far and have been able to accept the logic of thought that I have been trying to lay out before you, that what you have been referring to as "Thy Kingdom" or the "Kingdom of Heaven" in all your prayers ever since you were a mere strip of a girl can be nothing more or less than this Eternal and Infinite Consciousness wherein this universe both severally and collectively has existed from eternity to eternity in what I have described as its eternally-realised form and perfection.

#### SHREE BRINDABAN

This is really what our Vaishnava poet-philosophers have conceived and realised as *Shree Brindaban*. There is this difference perhaps between your Kingdom of Heaven or Kingdom of God and our *Shree Brindaban* that while the former is conceived practically as an abstraction, as a logic of thought or at the utmost as the product of what you would call Faith

and what you would prefer to call religious fancy or imagination, the latter, that is our *Shree Brindaban* has been sought to be realised by our Vaishnava saints and seers and devotees as a concrete reality. And excuse me, if I say to you, my child, this concrete conception is by far the most rational and logical as it is also obviously the most soul-satisfying and therefore truly spiritual.

I do not pretend to the pure vision of the seers and the saints who see this *Brindaban* as clearly in their beatific vision as you and I see the things of this outer world of sense and matter. But yet I believe in this *Brindaban* as if I see it with these outer eyes. And all that I can do for you is to lay down the process of thinking and feeling that has revealed it to my thought.

#### LOGIC OF EXISTENCE

I have not seen God or Brahman. Yet I believe that God or Brahman exists because I find it is impossible to discover any basis of my own rational, emotional and volitional life except on the hypothesis of the existence of an Absolute Will. This is the ground of my belief in God.

And though I have not seen *Shree Brindaban*

I believe that it exists on the same kind of evidence upon which my belief in God is based. *Shree Brindaban* is the logic of my experience of this outer cosmic, this inner mental and this human social order in which I live, move and have my being.

I look at this outer world of matter and sense, and how do the beauties of this world hold my soul in their bondage? The sun, the moon, the stars, the cloudless blue autumn, the rushing storm winds, the pouring rains, the flashing streaks of lightning that renders darkness visible during the summer nights, the weird play of light and darkness high up in the heavens above—all these suggest perpetually to my mind their respective perfected forms and states. And my heart yearns for a celestial world wherein that which is imperfect but moving towards perfection here in this sidereal kingdom before me exists in its eternal perfection and beauty. Where are the promises of all these glories fully realised, my heart asks. If these promises are realised nowhere then what a cruel nightmare must this world be! If I have to believe that this world is nothing more than such a hideous nightmare, then I find my hold on God also slipping away from my soul. Then there can be no God either; in any case

there can be no God who is All-Good and All-Powerful. John Stuart Mill's dilemma then holds my soul down and I see no way of escaping from it. It is therefore that I say that if there is God, if He be the Eternal and Infinite Consciousness which holds all things and in which all things exist then this imperfect world of ours must be perfect in Him. This sidereal kingdom must exist in its eternally realised state in the very Being of the Lord.

From these celestial and these terrestrial objects and phenomena, when I look upon this wonderful animal kingdom, the beasts and the birds and the creatures that crawl the earth, and observe their struggles for life and perfection, my mind goes irresistibly out to an ideal animal kingdom where every sentient and moving and living thing exists in its own eternally-realised perfection. This is the necessary logic of biological evolution. And when I concentrate my thought in my inner vision of these idealities, I find them existing from eternity in the very Being of the Lord.

And when I let my eyes fall on the beauties of this earth as it passes its annual revolutions through the different seasons of the year, each resplendent in its special features and glories, my heart yearns still more intensely for

the sight of that perfect earth of which this earth of ours can only be a feeble reflection or replica. Behind this earth of ours there must be another earth wherein whatever imperfect here stands revealed in its fullest perfection. Like all things else this eternally realised perfection of the earth must also exist in the Consciousness of the Eternal and the Absolute as elements of His own Being.

And then when I look about me and see these humans in whom I find the highest and truest meaning of my own outer and inner life, in and through whom I realise my own self or soul, whose wisdom illumines my understanding, whose love moves and purifies my feelings, in whose service I find the highest realisation of my emotional life, my heart irresistibly is drawn towards that unseen world wherein the loves and lights of these human relations find their ultimate meaning and final end and realisation. Men and women so beautiful, so lovely and so loving, so good, so generous, so adorned with every virtue, are yet so frail, so weak, so changeable, so imperfect ! These very imperfections, however, suggest a state of absolute perfection somewhere towards which this progressive humanity have been unmistakably moving. And like all else these humans and this human society also must exist in



their eternally realised form and perfection in the Eternal Consciousness of the ABSOLUTE as parts and elements of His own Being.

#### KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

And finally when I withdraw myself from this outer world of sense and matter as well as from this social world, so full of love and beauty and joy and saving service, and stand "alone to the alone", trying to realise my inner soul-life, and watch and observe my inner thoughts, emotions and volitions, I find the same irresistible logic compelling me to cognise, even if I may not realise fully, an eternally-realised personality behind this progressively realising personality or individuality of mine which must have existed from eternity to eternity in the very Being of the Lord, as an eternal element of His consciousness, an object of His Thought, Emotions and Volition. Here I recognise that from eternity to eternity I too must have been a conscious participant in His Thought and Love and Volition ; that I too have an eternally realised state, I too have been from eternity to eternity a resident and a subject of His Kingdom, co-operating with Him in the performance of His Will.

And not only I but all my relations must

have existed there from eternity to eternity. For this "I" is an abstraction when considered apart from these relations. My own fatherhood here below suggests an eternally realised and perfected fatherhood in which state I must have existed from eternity to eternity in the Being of the Lord, as an element of His Consciousness, as part, so to say, of that very Being Itself. And so on in all my relations, whether as friend or son or lover, I must have existed in my eternally realised perfection in the Lord. But I could not be a father without sons and daughters nor a friend without friends, nor a lover without a love or loves, nor a son without father and mother, and so on and so forth. And these relations of mine, necessary for the realisation of my own sonship or fatherhood, my own friendship or brotherhood, my own ideal of lover or servant, must have also existed in their respective perfected and eternally-realised state along with me in the Being of the Lord. There in the Being of the Lord I am a perfect son, and my father and mother are perfect father and mother. There I am an ideal brother and my brothers and sisters are also perfect brothers and sisters. There I am a perfect lover and so is the object of my love. All these follow irresistibly from our experiences of the process through which we are passing in our present cycle of life.

And all these drive us irresistibly to the idea or ideal of what is called the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God in your language and literature and what our Vaishnava poets and seers have realised as *Brindaban*.

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